Hafa Adai!

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16 DAYS BEFORE CHRISTMAS

Saipan Tribune

THE CNMI'S FIRST DAILY NEWSPAPER

Volume XXXIV, Issue No. 245

www.saipantribune.com | MONDAY DECEMBER 9, 2024 | www.facebook.com/saipantribune

CEDA still deliberating MACS' QC

By KIMBERLY B. ESMORES
kimberly_esmores@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

The Commonwealth Economic Development Authority is in the process of deliberating the qualifying certificate sought by J&P Holdings (CNMI) LLC who intends to invest millions in the establishment of a new inter-island air service.

J&P Holdings, the owner and operator of Micronesia Air Cargo Services, Skydive Saipan, and Waco Adventures, is now interested in providing inter-island air service through the establishment of Micronesia Air

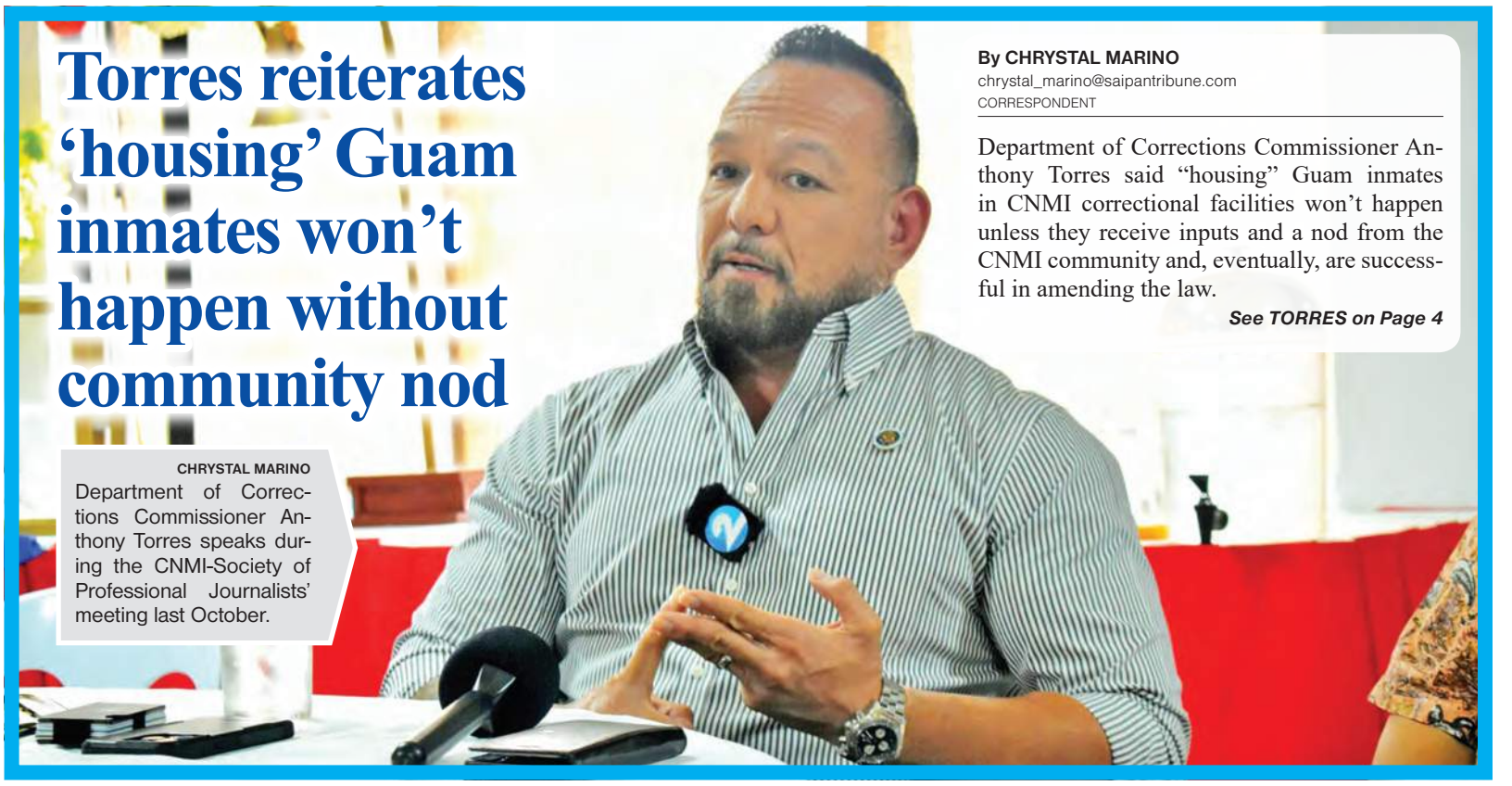
See CEDA on Page 4

Torres reiterates 'housing' Guam inmates won't happen without community nod

By CHRYSTAL MARINO
chrystal_marino@saipantribune.com
CORRESPONDENT

Department of Corrections Commissioner Anthony Torres said "housing" Guam inmates in CNMI correctional facilities won't happen unless they receive inputs and a nod from the CNMI community and, eventually, are successful in amending the law.

See TORRES on Page 4



CHRYSTAL MARINO
Department of Corrections Commissioner Anthony Torres speaks during the CNMI-Society of Professional Journalists' meeting last October.

Taiwanese President Lai has phone talks from Guam with US Congress leaders

TAIPEI, Taiwan (AP)—Taiwanese President Lai Ching-te held phone calls with U.S. congressional leaders on Thursday while visiting Guam, his second U.S. stop on a Pacific Island trip.

Lai said in a post on X that he had spoken with Republican House Speaker Mike Johnson and House Democratic leader Hakeem Jeffries to discuss security and economic cooperation.

He also spoke with U.S. Sen. Roger Wicker, the top Republican on the Senate Armed Services Committee, the post said.

See LEADERS on Page 4

AP
In this photo released by the Taiwan Presidential Office, Taiwan's President Lai Ching-te is seen on screen during a video call with U.S. Sen. Roger Wicker, the top Republican on the Senate Armed Services Committee, while he is in transit in Guam Thursday, Dec. 5, 2024.

ECOP Network launches ocean conservation efforts in CNMI

By CHRYSTAL MARINO
chrystal_marino@saipantribune.com
CORRESPONDENT

A young woman advocating for ocean conservation is set to launch the Early Career Ocean Professionals Network in the CNMI on Dec. 11.

Fresh from representing the CNMI at the Pacific Early Careers Ocean Professional Regional Integrated-Ocean Management Workshop in Fiji, Eloise Lopez returned home with

See ECOP on Page 4

INSIDE

NATION
Donald Trump has more than a month and a half to go before he's sworn in for a second term. But the Republican president-elect is already moving aggressively not just to fill his Cabinet and outline policy goals, but to achieve those priorities.
PAGE 9

WORLD
Insurgents' stunning march across Syria accelerated Saturday with news that they had reached the gates of the capital and that government forces had abandoned the central city of Homs.
PAGE 10

LIFE & STYLE
Nearly two decades after a pair of ruby slippers that were worn by Judy Garland in "The Wizard of Oz" were stolen from a Minnesota museum, the iconic shoes are set to be auctioned off to the highest bidder Saturday.
PAGE 11

SCAN ME WITH A COMPATIBLE QR READER TO KEEP UPDATED ON ALL THE LATEST NEWS.

GOT A NEWS TIP? TEL: 235-6397 / 235-2440 FAX: 235-3740 EMAIL: editor@saipantribune.com

Local

MANGO leadership meets with Apatang to strengthen support for nonprofits

Leadership from the Marianas Alliance of Non-Governmental Organizations recently met with Lt. Gov. David M. Apatang to present key initiatives, share insights on the nonprofit sector, and seek support for grant activities aimed at enhancing the impact of nonprofit organizations in the CNMI.

The meeting emphasized MANGO's pivotal role in empowering local nonprofits through capacity building, advocacy, and resource mobilization. During the discussion, MANGO representatives highlighted their flagship project, Giving Voice to Native Nonprofits, which focuses on increasing nonprofit inclusion in state planning activities, creating a comprehensive database of CNMI nonprofits, and equipping organizations with effective program data management tools.

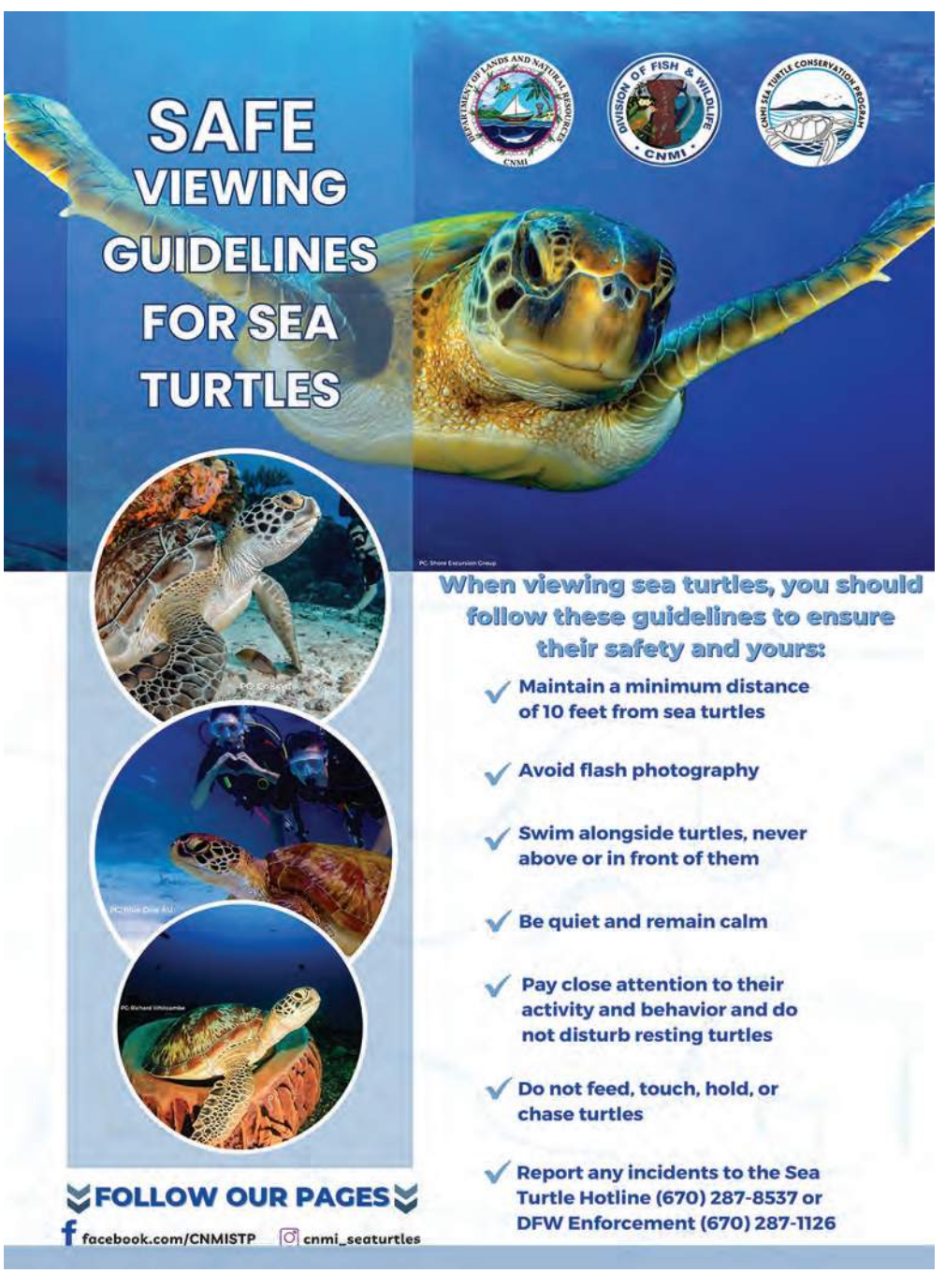
MANGO

Marianas Alliance of Non-Governmental Organizations Finance & Operations director Franco Santos, executive director Frances Sablan, and Development & Communications director Laurie Peterka pose with Lt. Gov. David M. Apatang and special assistant to the lieutenant governor Henry Hofschneider.

Apatang expressed gratitude for MANGO's dedicated efforts to preserve cultural traditions, promote sustainable practices, and strengthen the nonprofit sector's contributions to the community. He acknowledged the importance of supporting nonprofits in addressing community needs and pledged to explore ways the administration can collaborate with MANGO to achieve shared goals.

"This collaboration is a significant step forward for MANGO as we continue to amplify the voices of nonprofits that play an essential role in shaping the future of the CNMI," said Frances Sablan, executive director of MANGO. "We are grateful for the opportunity to discuss how the government can partner with us to address pressing community needs and support long-term development goals."

MANGO is a coalition of community-based nonprofits in the CNMI dedicated to supporting indigenous livelihoods, preserving cultural heritage, and promoting environmental stewardship. Through collaborative programs, resources, and advocacy, MANGO empowers local nonprofits to strengthen their communities and advance sustainable development. ***(PR)***


SAFE
VIEWING
GUIDELINES
FOR SEA
TURTLES
When viewing sea turtles, you should follow these guidelines to ensure their safety and yours:
Maintain a minimum distance of 10 feet from sea turtles
Avoid flash photography
Swim alongside turtles, never above or in front of them
Be quiet and remain calm
Pay close attention to their activity and behavior and do not disturb resting turtles
Do not feed, touch, hold, or chase turtles
Report any incidents to the Sea Turtle Hotline (670) 287-8537 or DFW Enforcement (670) 287-1126
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cnmi_seaturtles

Friday the 13th? Try the Art Bazaar!

Why would we have an Art Bazaar on Friday the 13th? This year, Rep. John Paul Sablan (Ind-Saipan) is sponsoring the fourth annual community event of a holiday craft show, Art Bazaar, at the Pedro P. Tenorio Multi-Purpose Center on Friday, Dec. 13 from 9:30am to 6pm. Is the day bad luck?

The superstition

Friday the 13th is believed to be an unlucky day, according to western philosophies. The number 13 crops up as a symbol of misfortune in various places. High rise buildings that have no 13th floor. In sports and especially race car driving, 13 was banned from assignment to participants. In the popular Harry Potter series, there is a scene where the professor of fortune-telling, Sibyl Trelawney, hesitates to join the Christmas feast because she will make the dinner party number 13. "Never forget," she says, "when 13 dine, the first to rise is the first to die." And Fridays were also traditionally linked to misfortune. The combination of the two is deemed doubly unlucky.

Some history

The Friday the 13th superstition's origins lay in the murky past. Perhaps it stems from Norse mythology, where the trickster god, Loki, retaliated when he was not invited to a dinner party of the other 12 gods. He got Balder, god of joy and gladness to shoot an arrow into them, but the arrow had been tipped with mistletoe, causing death and destruction. Much sadness and suffering ensued. Or perhaps it is related to Christianity, where 13 apostles dined with Jesus and he was then betrayed and died on a Friday.

Despite these ancient possible sources, the superstition only appears in writing around the early 19th century, through a character in an 1834 play, and then later in 1868 with the death of Rossini, an Italian composer, and then in 1907 in a novel of the same name.

Staying safe

Warding off evil has just as many superstitions as the misfortune. Suggestions include throwing salt over your left shoulder to ward off evil spirits; knocking on wood to call forth the protection of tree guardians: and wearing blue, a supposed color of blue luck.

Saipan's Art Bazaar

But our holiday Art Bazaar is on Friday, the 13th! Never fear, though, because there is nothing that will bring you good fortune, good karma, or good luck more than supporting your local artists and crafts persons!

Here are some tips for enjoying the Art Bazaar

The timing? You may be thinking but it's on a Friday and I work. This is a hurdle that you can overcome. Visit during your breaks or lunch hour! Come after school if you're a teacher or student, or after work for those close-out deals! Or if all else fails, have someone else go and shop for you

Be prepared and bring cash. It's fun to shop, but no one need go into debt for the holidays. Using cash helps you stick to your budget. It also recognizes the fact that some of the artists and crafts persons will not have the means to accept credit /debit cards or Venmo or PayPal or other non-cash payments.

Buy gifts! The holiday craft show is a perfect place to find unique gifts for your family and friends. Whether you're buying for the up-coming holidays, a birthday, an expectant mother, an anniversary—whatever! Make a list of those you want to buy for and then be open to all kinds of possibilities from the wide range of art and crafts available.

You might want small token gifts, like the Made By Hand Café at Home packets for coffee drinkers, tea aficionados, and chocolate lovers or crochet and fiber arts key chains from Merias Crochet or Uchanesti. You might want gifts for children, like island logo tee-shirts from Susan Cabrera or phone charms from Made by Almay. You might like some holiday flair, like Christmas wreaths from Designer Wreath & Co. or holiday candles with island scents from Susan Cabrera. You may want something for the very special person in your life and find the unique present, like a gift of jewelry from Made by Almay or a luxury item Made By Hand Afghan or a painting by Jeanne Rayphand perfect.

There will be these and many other choices you'll find at the Art Bazaar, but remember supplies are limited, some are unique, and this is a one-day event.

Pamper yourself. You should also include in your budget, if you can afford it, some self-love. Whether you end up with a small item, like eco-friendly Made By Hand face scrubbies, Merias Crochet plumeria hair clips, or an island breeze butterfly top by Uchanesti, pampering yourself will help you get through the rest of the year.

Protect yourself. And since the Art Bazaar is on Friday the 13th, let me also recommend checking for åmot (Chamorro medicine) at Bishu Marianas.

This Friday the 13th, do not worry or fear superstitious bad luck. Come to the Art Bazaar at the Multi-Purpose Center and support your local artists and crafters. Ward off the evil spirits with your community love. ***(PR)***

Smoke and dye testing for CK on Dec. 10-12

The Commonwealth Utilities Corp. would like to inform the general public that dye tests and smoke tests will be conducted in Chalan Kanoa (Doctor Torres Dr., Texas Rd., Guilermo Ave., Herman Ave., and Hilarion St.) from Tuesday, Dec. 10, to Thursday, Dec. 12, from 8:30am to 3:30pm.

The purpose of these tests is to locate leaks, breaks, and other connections in CUC's sewer system.

About the dye test

A dye test is a sewer inspection method whereby nontoxic dye is introduced into the toilets and cleanouts of participating customers. CUC's wastewater operators will monitor sewer lines for any signs of the presence of the dye. If the dye appears in CUC's sewer lines within the customer's area, the customer will then be informed of their connection, and the data will be sent to the Billing Department for proper billing.

Customers should be expecting a visitation from CUC's Wastewater Operators to request access before performing the dye test.

About the smoke test

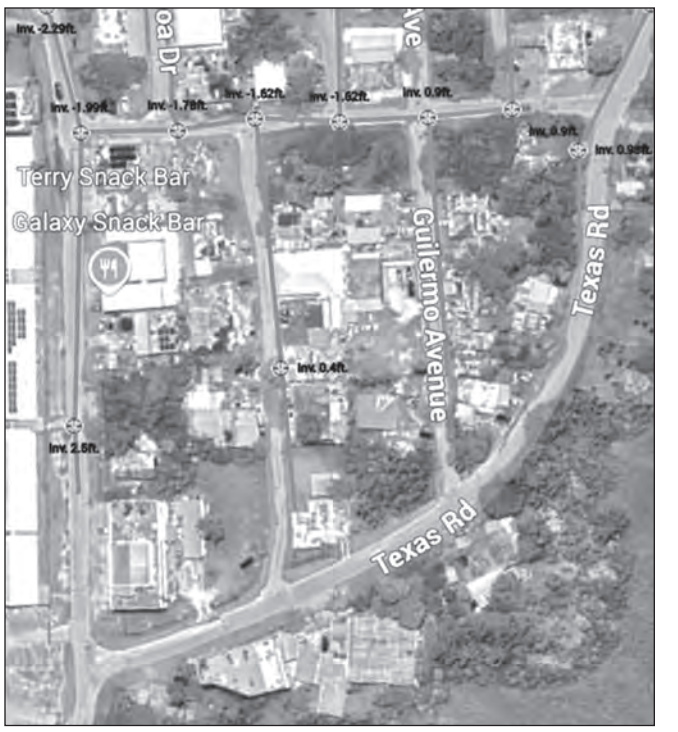
A smoke test is a sewer inspection method whereby nontoxic smoke is forced into sewer system access points. The smoke travels through all connected pipes in the sewer system, indicating pipe leaks, breached utility holes, cracks, uncapped lines, and other defects. Testers can also locate unknown pipe sections, such as cleanouts, downspouts, and sump pumps.

The smoke is nontoxic, nonhazardous, and is manufactured specifically for this purpose. It leaves no residue or stains and has no effects on plants or animals. The smoke is not expected to enter your home; however, if it does, it will have a distinct odor and should clear out within a few minutes with proper ventilation. Please be advised that all plumbing fixture drain traps must be filled with water before the test.

To ensure the safety of CUC's crew, certain roadways will be closed during the testing period to allow Wastewater Operators to access the manholes. Motorists are advised to reduce speed and exercise caution while driving in the area or take alternative routes.

CUC appreciates the public's cooperation and understanding in helping identify customer connections. CUC aims to conduct these tests efficiently while minimizing disruption to customers' daily activities. By proactively engaging in this testing, CUC reaffirms its commitment to providing reliable wastewater services for the community.

For more information, contact CUC's hotline at (670) 236-4333, visit its website, and monitor its Facebook page for the latest updates. For emergencies, contact Customer Service at (670) 664-4282. ***(PR)***



CUC

The map of the Commonwealth Utilities Corp.'s dye tests and smoke tests in Chalan Kanoa (Doctor Torres Dr., Texas Rd., Guilermo Ave., Herman Ave., and Hilarion St.) from Tuesday, Dec. 10, to Thursday, Dec. 12.

CUC ADVISORIES

CUC offices closed today

In observance of Constitution Day, the Commonwealth Utilities Corp. offices and customer service centers will be closed on Monday, Dec. 9, 2024.

For more information, contact CUC's hotline at (670) 236-4333 or visit its website at www.cucgov.org and monitor its Facebook page for the latest updates. In case of an emergency, contact Customer Service at (670) 664-4282. ***(PR)***

Scheduled power service interruption for Rota today

The Commonwealth Utilities Corp. would like to inform the general public that there will be a scheduled power service interruption on Monday, Dec. 9, 2024. See additional information below:

Monday, Dec. 9, 2024

- Power Service Interruption Time: 8:30am-1:30pm
- Area(s) Affected: Feeder 2 (CUC Power Plant to Sinapalo I, II, and III, Rota International Airport, Chenchon, and Pali' areas)
- Water Well(s) Affected: None
- Purpose: To allow the CUC line crew to replace power pole hardware, and perform vegetation maintenance near the primary line and power poles.

CUC appreciates the public's cooperation and understanding as we work to ensure reliable service for our customers. For more information, contact CUC's hotline at (670) 236-4333, visit its website and monitor its Facebook page for the latest updates. For emergencies, contact Customer Service at (670) 664-4282. ***(PR)***

Scheduled water service interruption on Dec. 11

The Commonwealth Utilities Corp. would like to inform the general public that there will be a scheduled water service interruption on Wednesday, Dec. 11, 2024. See additional information below:

Wednesday, Dec. 11, 2024

- Water Service Interruption Time: 9:30am-4:30pm
- Area(s) Affected: Chinatown, Upper MIHA Housing, As Falipe, Upper Navy Hill, and portions of Chalan Galaide
- Purpose: To allow CUC water operators to perform maintenance repairs on Navy Hill Road.

To ensure the safety of CUC's crew, the eastbound lane on Navy Hill Road will be closed.

Motorists are advised to reduce speeds and exercise caution while driving in the area or taking alternative routes. Customers in the area will experience low to no water pressure between the specified hours. Please allow one to two hours for the water lines to fully pressurize.

CUC appreciates the public's cooperation and understanding as CUC works to ensure reliable service for its customers. For more information, contact CUC's hotline at (670) 236-4333, visit its website, and monitor its Facebook page for the latest updates.

In case of emergencies, contact Customer Service at (670) 664-4282. ***(PR)***

NORTHERN MARIANAS HOUSING CORPORATION

P.O. BOX 500514, Saipan, MP 96950-0514
Email: nmhc@nmhc.gov.mp Website: http://www.cnmi-cdbgdr.com

AMENDMENT No. 2

INVITATION FOR BID (IFB) NMHC IFB 2025-001

(This ad is paid by NMHC by HUD funds)

BID SUBMISSION DATE: ~~November 29, 2024~~ December 13, 2024, 2:00 p.m.

CONSTRUCTION OF CHILD CARE FACILITY IN ROTA

Project Package will be available on October 29, 2024, at the NMHC Central Office in Garapan, Saipan, during regular working hours (7:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.) Monday thru Friday except CNMI holidays. A non-refundable payment of One-Hundred Dollars ($100.00) is required for each set of the project package. Payment must be made payable to NMHC and receipt of payment must be presented when obtaining the project package at the reception counter.

Brief description of the project package is available on the NMHC Website at www.nmhcgov.net "Procurement Tab".

The provisions on the NMHC Procurement regulations, NMIAC 100-60-725 AND 100-60-730 Prohibiting Gratuities, Kickbacks and Contingent Fees shall apply.

A Mandatory Pre-Bid Conference will be held at the Rota Mayors Office Conference Hall in Tatachog, Rota on ~~**November 13, 2024, 10:00 a.m.**~~ **November 20, 2024, 10:00 a.m.** In addition, a Mandatory site Visit/Inspection of the project site will be conducted immediately after the Pre-Bid Conference. Failure to attend both the Mandatory Pre-bid conference and the Mandatory site Visit/Inspection will be considered a non-responsive bidder.

For more information, contact Mr. Jacob Muna, Office Manager, at (670) 234-9447 or via email at officemanager@nmhcgov.net during business hours, 7:30am – 4:30pm Monday through Friday, except CNMI holidays.

/s/ Jesse S. Palacios
Acting-Corporate Director

/s/ Merced "Marcie" M. Tomokane
Chairwoman
NMHC Board of Directors

COMMONWEALTH UTILITIES CORPORATION

Office of the Executive Director

INVITATION FOR BIDS CUC-IFB-25-003

CONSTRUCTION OF AS MATUIS TEMPORARY TANK

The Office of the Executive Director, Commonwealth Utilities Corporation (CUC) is soliciting competitive sealed bids from qualified firms for the construction of **a temporary water tank in As Matuis.**

The project consists of a temporary water tank in As Matuis with the furnishing of all labor, supervision, equipment and materials for a new temporary fiberglass tank located in As Matuis. The work shall be done in accordance with the Project Plans and Specifications and without disruption to the daily operation of the water system. CUC requires the Project to be completed in Two Hundred Seventy (270) calendar days from date of award of contract.

The project is funded by a grant from the United States of Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA). The award of this project is contingent upon receipt of approval for project award from USEPA.

Prospective Bidders must pre-register with the CUC Procurement & Supply Division. The Bid Package may be obtained from the CUC Procurement and Supply Office, 3rd Floor, Room No. 3, Joeten Dandan Commercial Building, Saipan, between 7:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. and 12:30 p.m. to 4:00 p.m., Monday through Friday, except on government observed holidays, upon completion of registration and presentation of a receipt evidencing a non-refundable payment to the CUC Treasury Section, by cash, check or credit card in the amount of $200.00 (non-refundable) for one IFB package set.

A Pre-Bid Conference followed by site visits will be held on **November 26, 2024 at 1:00 PM (CHST)** at the CUC Main Conference Room, 3rd Floor, Room No.17, Joeten Dandan Commercial Building.

One (1) original and Five (5) hardcopies of the bid must be submitted in a sealed envelope marked "CUC-IFB-25-003, Construction of As Matuis Temporary Tank" to the CUC Procurement & Supply Office, 3rd Floor, Room No. 3, Joeten Dandan Commercial Building, P.O. Box 501220, Saipan, MP 96950, no later than **10:00 AM (CHST) on December 19, 2024,** at which time they will be publicly opened and read aloud. Bids mailed via postal or courier service must be received on or before due date and time or post-marked before due date and time.

Bid shall be submitted on the provided Bid Forms. Bidders are required to complete all Bid Forms. Bidders may supplement this form as appropriate. Bids will be required to be submitted under a condition of irrevocability for a period of 60 days after submission. **Late submissions and conditional bids will not be considered.**

A *Bid Guarantee* of fifteen (15%) percent of the total bid price must accompany the bids. The security deposit may be in cash, certified check, cashier's check, or bid bond executed by a surety company holding a certificate of authority from the United States Secretary of Treasury as an acceptable surety. A *Payment Bond* of one hundred (100%) percent and a *Performance Bond* of one hundred (100%) percent of the total bid price will be required upon the execution of the contract by the successful bidders. The Payment and Performance bond must be executed by a surety company holding a certificate of authority from the United States Secretary of Treasury as an acceptable surety. Surety Company must be authorized to do business in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands or otherwise secured in a manner satisfactory to CUC, for the protection of all persons supplying labor and material to the contractor or its subcontractors for the performance of the work provided for in the contract.

All insurers' questions, concerns and qualification shall be handled by the Department of Commerce Office of the Insurance Commissioner (OIC). The OIC is tasked with regulating and monitoring compliance to the CNMI's Insurance Code (Title 4, Division 7). *Bidders are required to submit a clearance from the OIC certifying their insurer of choice is in compliance with the CNMI's Insurance Code.*

Bidders are required to comply with all CNMI and applicable Federal Laws. This bid and the ensuing contract shall be executed pursuant to the CUC Procurement Regulations.

This Invitation for Bids does not commit CUC to the award of a contract or contracts, nor to pay any cost incurred in the preparation and submission of bids in anticipation of a contract. Bidders are advised that CUC assumes no responsibility in any act of omission on the part of the bidders due to lack of information or understanding of the bid requirements in the course of Contractor's preparation of a bid under the contract.

Questions or requests for clarification will be entertained only from registered Proponents and must be submitted in writing no later than **10:00 a.m. (CHST) on December 3, 2024** to Manny B. Sablan, CUC Purchasing Administrator via email address, manny.sablan@cucgov.org with a copy to Marcela Tenorio, P&S, Senior Administrative Technician at marcela.tenorio@cucgov.org.

CUC reserves the right to reject any or all bids for any reason and to waive any defects in said bid, if in its sole opinion, to do so would be in the best interest of CUC. All bids shall become the property of CUC.

KEVIN O. WATSON
Executive Director

MANNY B. SABLAN
Purchasing Officer

ECOP

From page 1

a mission to empower young professionals and connect the community to a global network of ocean conservationists.

For Lopez, the vision behind ECOP is deeply rooted in her experiences as an ocean team leader with Friends of the Marianas Trench and her lifelong connection to the ocean.

"I see PECOP as a vital bridge for bringing Early Career Ocean Professionals to the CNMI. Living on a small island can sometimes feel isolating, but our voices as Pacific Islanders carry the weight of generations of cultural knowledge and a deep connection to the ocean. My vision is to bring PECOP to the CNMI to ensure that islanders, despite our remote location, recognize the vast opportunities available to us and ocean space programs like PECOP can amplify our perspectives showing the world that even from the smallest islands, we can drive meaningful change," she said.

Lopez envisions the CNMI ECOP Network as a bridge that empowers Pacific Islanders to share their cultural knowledge and innovative ideas on the global stage.

Seeking to foster connection and igniting action, Lopez shared that the CNMI ECOP Network aims to unite local youth, early-career professionals, and community members under a shared mission: preserving the ocean's vitality for future generations. Through online workshops and local initiatives, participants will collaborate on projects focused on sustainable fishing practices, marine resource management, coral reef restoration, and marine debris reduction.

"By joining the ECOP Network, we can learn from other Pacific Island nations, share our experiences, and address common challenges together," Lopez explained, adding that collaborative spirit is integral to the network's approach, which will blend traditional knowledge with modern science to tackle pressing environmental issues.

When speaking on what was her inspiration and opportunity to begin this network, Lopez said that the passion for ocean conservation was and is something personal to her.

Born and raised in the CNMI, she sees the ocean as both a source of sustenance and a teacher. Her connection to the sea deepened through her work in ocean conservation education and mentoring initiatives.

"The ocean has given me purpose," she said, reflecting on how her upbringing has shaped her dedication to preserving the marine environment.

A longer version of this story is available at www. saipantribune.com

LEADERS

From page 1

"#Taiwan is grateful for the bipartisan #US Congressional support as we advance peace & prosperity in the Indo-Pacific," he wrote.

China, which considers Taiwan a renegade province, opposes any official interaction between the island's government and the United States. The U.S. is the main overseas supplier of arms for Taiwan's defense, and has naval and air force bases on Guam.

In Beijing, Foreign Ministry spokesperson Lin Jian noted the government's previous statements on U.S. official interactions with Taiwan and said that "the Taiwan issue is at the core of China's core interests and the first red line that must not be crossed in China-U.S. relations."

Lai arrived in Guam on Wednesday night after stops in Hawaii, the Marshall Islands and Tuvalu. From Guam, he headed to Palau, the final stop on his trip. He met the governor of Guam and spoke to the legislature, where he emphasized the shared values and strategic importance of Taiwan and Guam in the Indo-Pacific region.

"Let us together become the crucial force in defending freedom, democracy in the first island chain," he said, referring to a string of islands off the Asian continent that includes Japan, Taiwan and part of the Philippines.

His remarks drew a contrast with China's authoritarian one-party government, which claims Taiwan as its territory and says the self-governing island must come under its control at some point in the future.

Lai's talks with both Republican and Democratic leaders seemed designed to underscore the bipartisan support for Taiwan in the U.S. Congress.

While in Hawaii, he also spoke with former U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, whose visit to Taiwan in 2022 sparked an angry response from China that included major military drills around the island and cutting off talks with the U.S. in several areas including defense.

Taiwanese media said Lai had phone calls with Johnson and Jeffries and a video call with Wicker.

China's Foreign Ministry also announced sanctions Thursday on 13 American companies and six executives in response to recently announced weapons sales to Taiwan. The executives include the president and vice president of Raytheon's Naval Power strategic business unit. The sanctions include a ban on entering China, including Hong Kong and Macao.

"U.S. attempts to assist Taiwan independence by arming Taiwan will not shake our firm determination to oppose Taiwan independence and achieve national reunification, and it will only push Taiwan into a dangerous situation of military conflict," Lin said.

A resolution from Guam's legislature welcomed Lai and expressed appreciation for Taiwan's "significant contributions to Guam's economy and community," Speaker Therese Terlaje said.

Lai called for deeper cooperation with Guam, highlighting aquaculture, hydroponic agriculture, construction projects and alternative energy as potential areas of partnership.

The three Pacific Island nations he visited—Marshall Islands, Tuvalu and Palau—are among 12 governments that recognize Taiwan diplomatically. The rest of the world, including the United States, has official ties with the Chinese government in Beijing.

TORRES

From page 1

"This is a community decision," he said. "We need townhall meetings to educate and address concerns. If we pursue this, it must make financial sense and prioritize the safety of our staff and community," he said responding to questions about Guam's overpopulated prison system and the potential to house its inmates in the CNMI during a meeting with the CNMI-Society of Professional Journalists.

Torres also assured that if the DOC ends up housing inmates from neighboring Guam, there won't be any shortcuts.

"The way that I look at this is, if this were to happen, we would have to do this right. There would be a lot of details involved but we'd have to do it right to ensure the safety of our staff and the community and it would have to make sense financially. I'm not going to do it if it's if it doesn't make sense and if it's not a good fit," he said.

Torres suggested discussions about the CNMI housing Guam inmates could happen in early 2025.

He remains convinced that the Commonwealth housing Guam inmates will help not only the DOC financially but can also be a boon to the local community in terms of the programs the additional money can fund.

"We have over 400-500 beds and currently house 170 inmates. Can we leverage that space? One-hundred inmates at $120 per day would generate over $4 million annually. I can work on giving my staff raises, I can look at hazard pay, I can look at light differential, I can look at enhancing my inmate programming, I can look at buying equipment, I can look at getting more training for my staff... and then whatever I can do to help the community right? And that's just an example."

When asked if any meetings with lawmakers have been set up to discuss the proposal, Torres said, "Before that can happen the community needs to be bought in. They need to have the faith and confidence in me and my department for it to happen. And it's up to the community. It's up to our people."

He stressed that he wants transparency in his leadership approach, noting that any decision would require extensive planning and public involvement.

"I've been upfront about this. It's about doing my homework, demonstrating respect, and answering all questions."

Torres also highlighted ongoing rehabilitation programs designed to reintegrate inmates into the community, and enhancing these rehabilitation programs.

Beyond operational considerations, Torres highlighted efforts to expand inmate rehabilitation programs.

"We're bumping up our faith-based programs and have introduced a pickleball program with donated equipment," he said. "Our outreach program, in partnership with [Northern Marianas Technical Institute] and the [Hinemlo O'hala Para Enteramenti Recovery Center], equips inmates with valuable skills such as welding and electrical work."

He also outlined plans to convert a housing unit into a residential substance abuse treatment center, which could be operational by mid-2025. "We're laying the foundation now, from policies to staffing."

For future initiatives, Torres spoke on his wish to introduce a GED program in collaboration with Northern Marianas College and exploring hospitality certification courses for female inmates. "This would prepare them for gainful employment in the hospitality sector upon release," he noted. "Our goal is to provide tools for success, reducing recidivism and promoting reintegration."

Inspired by Singapore's Yellow Ribbon Initiative, Torres expressed optimism about the CNMI's potential to emulate similar reintegration efforts. "If they can do it, so can we," he said. "We're on the right track."

At the end of the day, Torres wants to set up inmates for success after they've been rehabilitated.

"We want to give them the tools for it. I'm not saying that everybody that's going to come out of our doors is not coming back. That's very unrealistic of me. But if we set them up for with the tools for success, we're going to raise their chances of not coming back and reoffending... I'm very grateful and thankful that we have a lot of businesses and local agencies and government agencies who are very open-minded and embracing that philosophy."

While exploring innovative revenue streams and enhancing programs, Torres shared that he still remains committed to ensuring that DOC's operations align with public safety and community interests.

CEDA

From page 1

Connection Services. However, because it would take upwards of $8 million to purchase the planes alone, J&P Holdings has applied for a qualifying certificate with CEDA.

A qualifying certificate essentially exempts a business from paying local taxes over a period of time.

In an update from Dave Guerrero, CEDA Economic Development manager, CEDA is still deliberating the application.

"We're still deliberating. There will be a special meeting this week to discuss the QC. I know the board had additional questions but [the company] came back with responses. Now, we're going to discuss their response," he said.

Guerrero said CEDA has 90 days to decide what action they will take regarding the qualifying certification application.

"There is a 90-day requirement for CEDA to send a recommendation to the governor but we're still ways before that so we're still going to deliberate. The deadline is on Jan. 5," he said.

Gov. Arnold I. Palacios earlier expressed his support for tax incentives for J&P Holdings to provide inter-island air service.

According to *Saipan Tribune* archives, should CEDA grant J&P Holdings (CNMI) LLC a qualifying certificate—essentially to waive certain local taxes for J&P Holdings, its subsidiaries, and its owners—Micronesia Air Connections Services could start providing regular inter-island air service as early as December.

A longstanding CNMI investor, J&P Holdings, owned by John and Paula Stewart, has decided to branch out from air cargo, charter, scenic flight, and skydiving services by establishing a new airline in the CNMI focused on safe and reliable inter-island travel as well as direct air service from Saipan to Guam.

However, providing this kind of service is no easy feat as it would cost upwards of $8 million to cover the costs of acquiring planes alone (specifically nine 9-seater planes, with plans to expand into 19-seater planes).

According to J&P Holdings tax attorney Tina Azarvand, to ensure the airline's viability and sustainability, the company has applied for a qualifying certificate with the CEDA for abatement and rebate of certain CNMI taxes.

Essentially, the certificate would waive certain taxes MACS would need to pay to the local government for a certain number of years.

Azavand explained that the qualifying certificate's benefits extend beyond just helping the new airline (MACS) and its parent company (J&P Holdings). Her trickle-down economics explanation contends that the certificate helps MACS avoid financial losses in its early years, when startup costs are high, and profits are low. This financial support enables J&P Holdings to invest in new aircraft, pay landing fees, and take on the risks of providing air service.

The lawyer states that the initial tax benefits to the company would then flow down through increased tourism to revitalize the CNMI's COVID-impacted economy "leading to higher hotel occupancies, increased car rentals, more restaurant dining, and greater overall visitor spending throughout the community, resulting in incidental tax revenue increases for the CNMI."

Most importantly, with MACS in operation, the people of Tinian and Rota will have another option in terms of inter-island travel as MACS would bring in much needed competition which in turn would mean lower fares.

MACS intends to offer competitive fares for flights between Saipan and Tinian, Rota, and Guam. Final fares will depend on landing fees and the outcome of the qualifying certificate. MACS will also provide discounts to locals, seniors, and veterans.

UOG Social Work Program accreditation reaffirmed

The University of Guam's Bachelor of Social Work program has been reaffirmed for accreditation through 2031 by the Commission on Accreditation of the National Council on Social Work Education.

The social work program, which runs under the Margaret Perez Hattori-Uchima School of Health, prepares its graduates to work in the field and pursue a master's degree in social work. CSWE accreditation is recognized by educational institutions, licensing boards, and employers. The accreditation team visited the University in April, and the announcement of reaffirmation was made in late October.

"If you come from an accredited social work program, you can go anywhere and go into an advanced standing program, meaning you can get your accelerated master's in social work in a year," Social Work chair Dr. Tricia Lizama explained.

UOG

University of Guam Social Work faculty gather at a recent commencement ceremony. The Commission on Accreditation of the National Council on Social Work Education reaffirmed accreditation for the UOG's Bachelor of Social Work program through 2031. From left: Dr. Lisa Linda Natividad, professor of Social Work, Dr. Tressa P. Diaz, associate professor of Social Work, Dr. Gerhard Schwab, professor of Social Work; Dr. Vivian Dames, BSW Program founder and retired professor of Social Work; and Dr. Tricia Lizama, professor of Social Work.

UOG

The Commission on Accreditation of the National Council on Social Work Education has reaffirmed accreditation for the University of Guam's Bachelor of Social Work program through 2031. CSWE conducted an accreditation site visit in April. From left: Dr. Tricia Lizama, professor of Social Work; Dr. Yvette C. Paulino, dean, Margaret Perez Hattori-Uchima School of Health, Dr. Selena Rodgers, CSWE site visitor, Cori T. Aguon, extension associate, and Dr. Gerhard Schwab, professor of Social Work.

UOG president Dr. Anita Borja Enriquez congratulated the faculty, staff, administrators, and students in the social work program.

"Accreditation shows that our program is recognized for meeting standards of quality," she said. "Our students, and our community can be assured that graduates of the BSW program are capable and knowledgeable."

Accreditation under CSWE is a rigorous peer-review process that assures graduates can think critically, solve problems and advocate for justice, equity, inclusion, and diversity. Students begin the UOG social work program as part of a cohort in their junior year. In their senior year, they are placed in internships and get hands-on experience under the supervision of field instructors.

Currently, there are 17 social work students placed in internships at Child Protective Services, Guam Behavioral Health and Wellness Center, Guam Memorial Hospital, and other agencies.

"When they graduate, they're very prepared," Lizama said. "In their internships, they learn how to do assessments, how to build rapport and trust with people, how to do treatment plans."

The program has graduated over 400 students. Many have gone on to work in government agencies, for non-profit organizations and in the private sector. Most of the field instructors are program alumni, Lizama said.

One of the graduates, Cori T. Aguon, works as an extension associate for the program. She said the program prepares students to work in a variety of professions that make up the social work field.

"My background in this program has prepared me to carry out the duties and working in an administrative role," she said. "Our program also equips students to go on to graduate school."

Aguon went to graduate school at the University of Washington before coming home to Guam. Lizama, who graduated from the UOG program before its initial accreditation in 2003, received her master's degree from the University of Hawaii. Because UOG's program was not accredited at the time, she had to move to Oahu for two years and repeat some of the material that she studied.

With accreditation, the path to advanced degrees became much smoother.

Since 2012, UOG has had an agreement with the University of Hawaii that allows UOG's bachelor of social work graduates to complete the accelerated master's program in a year while living on Guam.

There have been 64 students who have received their master's degrees through the UH program, with another 15 expected to graduate in May.

The reaffirmed accreditation for UOG's Bachelor of Social Work program represents far more than an academic credential, it underscores an unwavering commitment to educational excellence and professional standards, ensuring that students receive a rigorous, forward-thinking education.

Beyond the rigor of academics, the program's emphasis on real-world learning and its strong network of alumni and local partnerships create a pipeline of skilled professionals addressing critical social issues on Guam and throughout the region.

As the program continues to grow and evolve, it remains a vital resource for developing the next generation of compassionate leaders, advocates, and problem-solvers—a legacy that will benefit the island community for years to come. ***(PR)***

UOG's healthy aging and cooking series to return in January

Adults of all ages are invited to a six-session wellness class focused on embracing aging and cooking healthy meals. Back by popular demand from earlier this year, the series combines the curriculum of the *Nihi ta Fanmama'tinas* (Let's Cook) and the Keys to Embracing Healthy Aging programs taught by University of Guam Cooperative Extension & Outreach.

The classes will take place from 4pm to 7pm on Jan. 6, 8, 10, 13, 15, and 17 in the Agriculture & Life Sciences Building, Room 125B, on the UOG campus.

Led by extension associates Clarissa Barcinas, Katrina Macasaquit, and Iesha Ibanez and family and consumer science specialist Dr. Tim de La Cruz, each class will cover a cooking topic and a topic on healthy aging according to the following schedule:

UOG

Workshop participants work together to prepare tofu kelaguen during the combined *Nihi ta Fanmama'tinas* (Let's Cook) and Keys to Embracing Healthy Aging workshop offered in June by the University of Guam extension nutrition team. The six-session workshop series will be offered for a second time starting on Dec. 2.

Monday, Jan. 6

Cooking Theme: Let's Chesa!

Wellness Topic: Positive Attitude and Eating Smart

Wednesday, Jan. 8

Cooking Theme: Let's Bake!

Wellness Topic: Physical Activity and Brain Activity

Friday, Jan. 10

Cooking Theme: Let's Make Soup and Salad!

Wellness Topic: Social Activity and Tuning into the Times

Monday, Jan. 13

Cooking Theme: Let's Cook on a Budget

Wellness Topic: Practice Being Safe and Know Your Health Numbers

Wednesday, Jan. 15

Cooking Theme: Let's Cook Breakfast!

Wellness Topic: Stress Management and Financial Affairs

Friday, Jan. 17

Cooking Theme: Let's Cook Local!

Wellness Topic: Sleep and Taking Time for You

Each session has a registration fee of $10, which covers workshop materials and food samples. Participants are encouraged to sign up for all six sessions.

To register, visit https://url.uog.edu/nihi-dec24 or contact Jane Mendiola or Clarissa Barcinas at (671) 735-2020/41 or email csnbarcinas@triton.uog.edu.

Follow UOG Cooperative Extension & Outreach on Facebook and Instagram to stay posted on upcoming workshops, or subscribe to the email list at www.uog.edu/extension/#Subscribe. ***(PR)***

Opinion

Hafa Adai!
Saipan Tribune
THE CNMI'S FIRST DAILY NEWSPAPER
Volume XXXIV, Issue No. 245

Published daily at 2/F JP Center,
Beach Road, Garapan, Saipan, CNMI
Mailing Address: PMB 34, Box 10001, Saipan, MP, 96950

Mark Rabago EDITOR
mark_rabago@saipantribune.com

MEMBER

The Associated Press | Pacific Islands News Association

EDITORIAL

Biden pardon sets a bad example, and it might help Miami's ex-Proud Boy leader

With his resounding victory, President-elect Donald Trump might not need an excuse to issue pardons for the people convicted of crimes in relation to the Jan. 6, 2021, attacks on the U.S. Capitol. But President Joe Biden's sweeping pardon of his son Hunter might have just given Trump the cover to do so with less political backslash—and with more dire implications for the country and Florida in particular.

For Biden, who spent the last four years vowing to defend American democratic institutions from the credible threat that Trump represents, this move damages his legacy. In this case, Biden chose his own family over the country. It was the wrong thing to do, not just because he put self-interest first but because it sets a terrible example.

The Sunshine State has been, at least at one point, home to the largest number of people arrested in relation to Jan. 6. Among them is Miami's former Proud Boys leader Enrique Tarrio, sentenced to 22 years last year for seditious conspiracy and other crimes in connection to what prosecutors described as a violent plot to overturn the 2020 elections.

Also from Florida is Kelly Meggs, state leader of the militia group the Oath Keepers, sentenced to 12 years and accused of storing weapons in a hotel outside Washington, D.C., in case they were needed during the invasion. Just last month, two other Florida men were arrested for allegedly using deadly or dangerous weapons on law enforcement officers, among other charges, during the attack.

As of August, more than 1,488 people had been charged in nearly all 50 states in connection to Jan. 6 and 944 defendants received sentences for their criminal activity, according to the U.S. Attorney's Office in the District of Columbia.

The pardon of Hunter Biden was certainly nepotism, but even worse is the possibility that the resulting lack of accountability for those convicted of violent crimes related to an attempt to reverse the results of a presidential election could embolden others who are willing to use force to advance their political causes.

Trump has repeatedly tried to downplay the Jan. 6 violence, when 140 police officers were assaulted, so pardoning at least some of those involved would further help him paint them and himself as "hostages" of a judicial system controlled by Democrats. In fact, after Biden pardoned his son, Trump posted on social media: "Does the pardon given by Joe to Hunter include the J-6 Hostages?"

Trump, at least, has hinted at what he might do to get Jan. 6 rioters off the hook, whereas Biden went back on his word to the American people.

Presidential pardons of people connected to the White House are not uncommon. Gerald Ford pardoned Richard Nixon, Bill Clinton pardoned his brother and Trump pardoned

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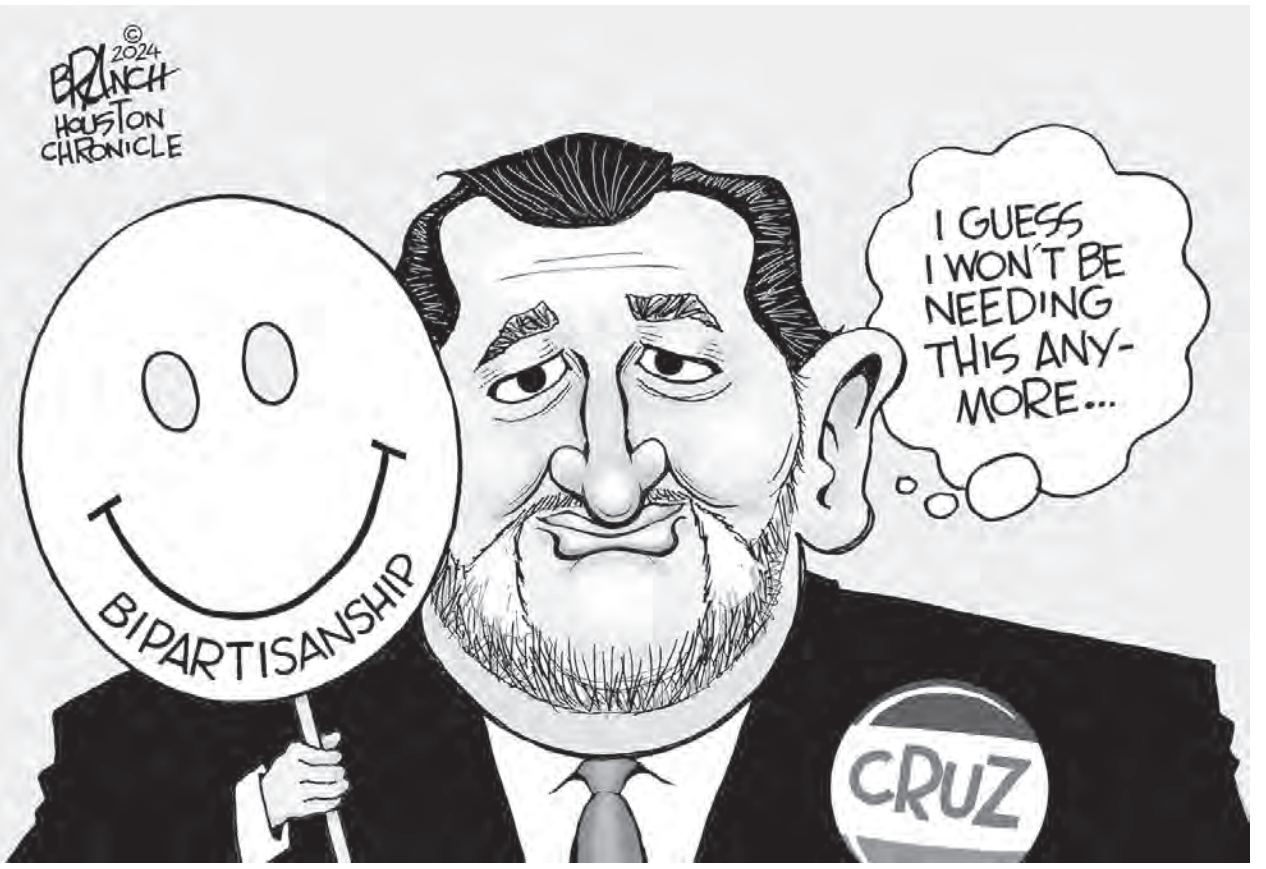

Trump's disastrous Cabinet picks will only cause him grief if confirmed

By CARL P. LEUBSDORF
The Dallas Morning News

Carl P. Leubsdorf is the former Washington bureau chief of the Dallas Morning News.

President-elect Donald Trump has virtually completed filling the top jobs in his new administration. His choices range from satisfactory to disastrous.

Unfortunately, the worst choices are for the most crucial national security posts, placing an unusual degree of responsibility on the new Republican-controlled Senate to closely examine them – and, if need be, reject some.

Trump's choices reflect his determination to prevent a repetition of his first term acquiescence in the selection of establishment figures as top aides and Cabinet members. This time, he wanted Trump loyalists, and he has done so, with a vengeance.

Even the best choices, like Secretary of State-designee Marco Rubio, Treasury Secretary-designee Scott Bessent and Agriculture Secretary-designee Brooke Rollins, earned their jobs by their fealty to Trump. Rubio and Bessent abandoned past positions on Ukraine and tariffs, respectively, to bring their views in line with his.

Their qualifications range from Rubio's service on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and Rollins' degree in agricultural development at Texas A&M University, to several with little experience, like Transportation Secretary-designate Sean Duffy, Housing and Urban Development Secretary-designate Scott Turner and Navy Secretary-designate John Phelan.

Still, most won't encounter confirmation problems, nor should they.

Unfortunately, their level of expertise and competence is not matched by Trump's choices for Secretary of Defense, Director of National Intelligence, Secretary of Health and Human Services, Secretary of Education and director of the FBI.

Each is a strong candidate for rejection. Here's why:

Defense Secretary-designate Pete Hegseth

National Guard service, even on active duty, is no qualification to run the sprawling Pentagon. And the Fox News anchor's denigration of women in the military and history of questionable sexual conduct should disqualify him at a time the Pentagon is coping with these issues.

His standing took a new hit with the release of emails in which his own mother called out his history of sexual misconduct. "I have no respect for any man that belittles, lies, cheats, sleeps around and uses women for his own power and ego," she wrote in the 2018 email which The New York Times obtained from an unnamed family member. In addition, a lengthy review of Hegseth's record by The New Yorker's Jane Mayer disclosed allegations of financial and personal misconduct in several prior positions.

Director of National Intelligence designee Tulsi Gabbard

Between her questionable ties to Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad and statements echoing Russian criticism of the U.S. role in Ukraine, the former Hawaii Democratic congresswoman would seem like an especially bad choice to manage the nation's most sensitive secrets.

The Senate Intelligence Committee's record for bipartisanship will be tested by this inappropriate nomination.

Secretary of Health and Human Services designee Robert F. Kennedy Jr.

When Trump rewarded Kennedy for his support by naming him to "run wild" over the nation's health programs, he opened a pandora's box that could threaten the very health of Americans he has vowed to improve. Not only has he denigrated the need for childhood vaccinations, but he is yet another nominee with a history of sexual misconduct.

In addition, Trump has given him an even more questionable supporting cast in choices to head the FDA, CDC and NIH.

Secretary of Education designee Linda McMahon

The former president of World Wrestling Entertainment and his first term Small Business Administrator also has sexual misconduct issues.

A lawsuit accuses McMahon and her husband, WWE founder Vince McMahon, of ignoring alleged sexual abuse by a WWE employee against teen-age boys. In 2010, she resigned from the Connecticut State Board of Education after the Hartford Courant reported she misrepresented her education qualifications.

Her selection fits Trump's plan to scrap the department, but they may find that hard to do without congressional approval.

Federal Bureau of Investigation director

Trump plans to demand the resignation of FBI Director Christopher Wray, a Republican he appointed after firing his predecessor, and install Trump loyalist and fierce FBI critic Kash Patel, a major perpetrator of the falsehood that Ukraine, not Russia, tried to influence the 2016 election.

See TRUMP on Page 7

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Transparency, trust, and the future of our faith community

Two weeks ago, I shared a letter to the editor, which has been shared with the Catholic Nuncio in New Zealand, titled "A betrayal of trust and heritage: Where are our Indigenous leaders?" expressing concerns about the diminishing role of indigenous leadership and cultural heritage within our Catholic Church community. I raised issues of marginalization, the loss of traditional values, and external influences that threaten the cultural identity painstakingly built by our forebears.

In response, Archbishop Ryan Jimenez highlighted the Church's mission to transcend ethnic boundaries, advocating unity and inclusiveness. While this perspective aligns with the broader Catholic vision, it does not address the heart of community concerns. Ryan's response seems to sidestep the issues raised, offering a generalized message of love and unity that, while noble, falls short of the accountability and engagement our underserved community needs. This is not about rejecting diversity but preserving and empowering the voices of those who have built and sustained the Church on these islands for generations.

Pope Francis has often emphasized synodality and consultation, calling for shared discernment and dialogue that includes the voices of local clergy and laity (*Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church*, 2018). These principles are vital in ensuring that leadership reflects the heart of the community it serves.

Sadly, no indigenous priest was invited to share leadership roles during Ryan Jimenez's tenure. Could it be why there are no takers for religious vocations? This exclusion overlooks the love, trust, and commitment our late Bishop Tomas A. Camacho gave to nurturing local clergy who deeply understand our people's cultural and spiritual needs.

True leadership listens, builds trust, and uplifts those who carry the legacy of faith and tradition. To honor our heritage and the teachings of Pope Francis, we must embrace inclusivity and ensure our leaders reflect the community they serve. Our diocese deserves no less.

The swift and opaque appointment of the new bishop for the Diocese of Chalan Kanoa raises further questions. Was this the final "gift" to a diocese that nurtured Archbishop Ryan and supported his growth, only to now see Indigenous leadership sidelined? The Diocese of Chalan Kanoa deserves leadership that listens, empowers, and respects the cultural foundations of this community. True unity is not achieved by ignoring problems but by addressing them with transparency, courage, and love. Our faith community cannot thrive on silence and avoidance; it requires open dialogue, accountability, and an unwavering commitment to honor the heritage entrusted to us.

Last week, I studied Catholic Websites for information on the selection of a bishop and canon law.

Canon 377 §1-2 establishes that the Pope has the sole authority to appoint bishops, but he is assisted by the Congregation for Bishops and the Apostolic Nuncio, who acts as the Pope's representative in the region.

Step 1. The Apostolic Nuncio's role is to ensure the selection process considers the community's unique cultural, social, and spiritual context. This initial phase typically spans the first 2-4 months after the vacancy and is the foundation for compiling the Terna, a shortlist of candidates for review by the Vatican.

Step 2. The Apostolic Nuncio consults with local bishops, priests, and lay leaders to understand the diocese's pastoral and cultural needs. A list of three candidates (Terna) is created and evaluated on qualifications in Canon 378 §1, such as faith, morals, pastoral zeal, leadership, and theological education. 2-4 months for consultations and evaluations.

Step 3. The Apostolic Nuncio submits the Terna to the Vatican's Congregation for Bishops, which reviews candidates and votes on recommendations to the Pope. Understanding the local cultural context is crucial for indigenous appointments, in line with Canon 383 §1, which emphasizes respecting cultural diversity while promoting unity. The review process typically takes 2-4 months.

Step 4: The Pope's Decision: The Congregation for Bishops presents their recommendation to the Pope, who can choose from the Terna candidates or select someone else. Canon 375 §1-2 highlights that bishops should govern and sanctify the Church while understanding their diocese's cultural and social needs, especially in indigenous communities. Depending on the Pope's discernment, the process may take 2-3 months.

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops states, "It often takes six to eight months—and sometimes longer—from the time a diocese becomes vacant until a new bishop is appointed." (https://www.usccb.org/offices/general-secretariat/appointing-bishops). The 8-12 month timeframe is quoted in Vatican guidelines on episcopal appointments, Apostolorum Successores (*Directory for the Pastoral Ministry of Bishops*), 2004.

Appointing a bishop is meant to be deliberate and prayerful, often taking 1-2 years to ensure the right leader is chosen. It took six years for Ryan to become a bishop and 15 months to take over in Agaña. Why are we rushing to install someone new in Chalan Kanoa when our diocese is still recovering from feeling abandoned under Ryan's leadership? I venture to think and fell some steps were circumvented

This haste disregards the trust and devotion of the faithful who have carried this Church through generations. Leadership should arise from careful discernment, honoring the voices and heritage of our people. We deserve a leader chosen with respect and love—not out of practicality. Let this not be a moment of rushing but of reflection, healing, and unity for our diocese. We must demand better.

In closing, the Catholic Diocese of Chalan Kanoa deserves leadership that reflects its people, respects its heritage, and upholds the traditions that have been the cornerstone of our faith through centuries of trials and tribulations. Despite the call to "forget the past," as Cardinal Tagle suggested, our past sustains us. Through the beliefs, customs, and traditions nurtured by great leaders like our late Bishop Tomas A. Camacho, we have persevered through colonization and cultural purges.

The Church stood with the Chamorro and Carolinian people when survival depended on faith and prayer. Now, we must stand firm in preserving this legacy by ensuring that Indigenous voices are heard and given the leadership roles in our Catholic Churches as they have earned through decades of commitment and sacrifice.

The appointment of a bishop is not a mere formality or political maneuver—it is a sacred, prayerful process that must honor Canon Law and the principles of inclusivity and representation. In dioceses like ours, where indigenous heritage is inseparable from the faith, the integration of local voices and traditions is essential. Anything less risks alienating the faithful and eroding the trust that has sustained this diocese for generations.

To move forward faithfully, we must honor the past and respect the people who built this Church. The Diocese of Chalan Kanoa cannot thrive without leaders who understand and embody this community's cultural and spiritual fabric. It is not too late for the Church to correct its course and reaffirm its commitment to the people who have clung to its sanctuary through centuries of adversity. Respecting the voices of the faithful is not only an act of justice, but it is the very foundation of the Church's mission.

Gary Sword
Via email

CNMI in crisis: A resident's frustration with leadership failures

Two years into the current administration, frustration has reached a boiling point. CNMI residents like myself are grappling with a reality where life has grown increasingly difficult, and the promises of a brighter future remain unfulfilled.

Basic services like keeping the lights on have become unreliable. Tourism—our No. 1 economic driver—is on life support with no clear recovery plan. Businesses are shuttering including one of my favorite restaurants in Garapan (scheduled to close permanently in January), drug trafficking is rising, and airfare costs have skyrocketed, limiting opportunities for travel and economic growth. The CPA is broke, utilities are broken, expensive and erratic, food prices are through the roof, and even our parks are neglected.

It's been two years since the previous administration, and they can no longer be blamed for the sad state of affairs in the CNMI. Looking back, it seems the opposite was true under their leadership. Despite the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, tourism was relatively healthy. Power and water services were reliable. Airfare was affordable thanks to increased competition, and overall, our people seemed happier and more optimistic. Even Guam envied the progress we were making at the time. Today, that progress feels like a distant memory. Frustration is widespread, and I believe most CNMI residents share my sentiment.

I still remember the bold promise made during campaign season 2022: "A new … administration will right the ship of government and place our Commonwealth on a healthier, more equitable, and more prosperous course." Two years later, it seems this ship has strayed dangerously off course and is headed toward treacherous waters.

It's time for the administration to take a hard look in the mirror and accept responsibility. The truth is clear—under their watch, things have gotten worse. It's time for drastic changes. Certain people in key positions must be replaced by people who will act decisively and effectively to steer the government back on course. Only then can we hope for smoother seas and brighter horizons.

But if no changes are made, then it's pure insanity. As the saying goes, insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.

For the sake of all CNMI residents, we need action—now. The people are suffering and our patience is running out.

Peter Castro
Concerned CNMI resident
Via email

BIDEN

From page 6

his son-in-law's father, whom he has now tapped to be ambassador to France.

The difference this time is that Biden said many times that he would hold himself to a higher standard. "I will not pardon him," he said in June when Hunter Biden was convicted, NBC News reported.

Hunter Biden was scheduled to be sentenced on federal gun charges and tax evasion later this month. Some experts have said the pardon was an unusually broad use of executive clemency given that it covered any federal crimes "he committed or may have committed" between Jan. 1, 2014, through the end of the year.

This is also going to make it harder for Biden and Democrats to continue to defend the judiciary system that brought charges against both Hunter Biden and Trump.

In a statement released Sunday, Biden said, "I have watched my son being selectively, and unfairly, prosecuted." Trump has similarly accused prosecutors and investigators of targeting him. His lawyers are already using Biden's own argument to ask the courts to throw out Trump's conviction in New York over a hush-money scheme.

Biden's pardon was a gift from a lame-duck president to his family. But with his action, the president has made it a whole lot harder for his party and the justice system to hold the Jan. 6 attackers, and others, to account.

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TRUMP

From page 6

Former Attorney General Bill Barr, who broke with Trump over his effort to overturn his 2020 defeat, blocked the former president from installing Patel at the FBI at the end of his prior administration.

Patel has labeled the FBI "a threat to the American people" and said he would "shut down the FBI Hoover Building on day one and reopen it the next day as a museum of the deep state." He also vowed "to come after the people in the media who lied about American citizens who helped Joe Biden rig presidential elections."

Trump's vendetta against the FBI stems from its role in launching the 2016 investigation of alleged Russian influence in his first presidential campaign, Like the recently dropped criminal cases against the president-elect, however, those allegations were never totally disproved.

The law gives FBI directors a 10-year term to prevent presidents from politicizing the office. By firing Wray, chosen after he fired predecessor James Comey, Trump would unfortunately further its politicization.

Because the Senate's 47 Democrats will likely line up against most of Trump's most questionable nominees, it will take at least four Republicans to defeat them. These confirmation votes will test how seriously the Senate plans to maintain its constitutional role in the Trump years.

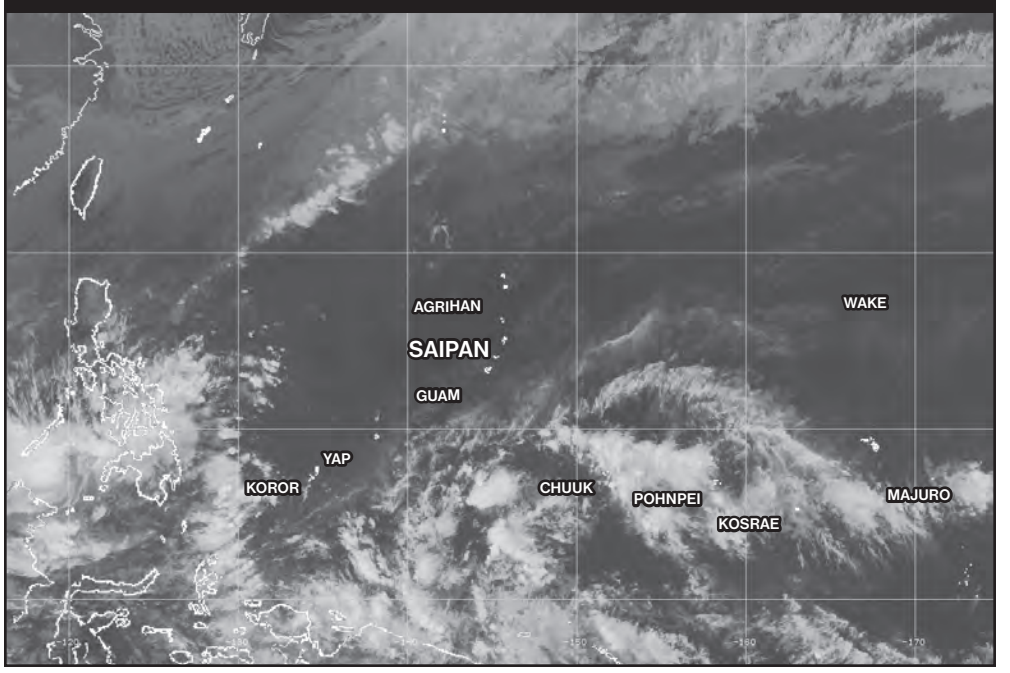
Senate rejection would actually do the president-elect a favor. Some of them will only cause him grief if they're confirmed.

The Weather

5-DAY FORECAST FOR SAIPAN AND TINIAN

TODAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
Partly cloudy with isolated showers. East winds 10 to 15 mph. Chance of showers 20 percent.	Mostly sunny with a 10 percent chance of showers. Northeast winds 10 to 15 mph.	Partly cloudy with a 20 percent chance of showers.	Partly cloudy with a 20 percent chance of showers.	Partly cloudy with a 20 percent chance of showers.
86° 78°	86° 78°	86° 78°	86° 78°	86° 78°

YESTERDAY'S SATELLITE IMAGE



PICTURE TIME: 5:29 AM SUNDAY, DECEMBER 8, 2024

Western North Pacific between equator and 25N from 130E to 180.

Satellite imagery shows partly cloudy skies over the Mariana Islands. Isolated showers have been detected over the western waters and are moving westward out of the coastal waters.

Satellite image and accompanying information are provided by the National Weather Service. For an updated weather forecast, visit the National Weather Service Guam homepage: https://www.weather.gov/gum/

MICRONESIA		▲ ▼ °F
Guam and Rota	Partly Cloudy	85° / 79°
Palau	Partly Cloudy	85° / 79°
Yap	Partly Cloudy	85° / 79°
Chuuk	Cloudy	85° / 80°
Pohnpei	Partly Cloudy	86° / 78°
Kosrae	Partly Cloudy	86° / 78°
Majuro	Cloudy	85° / 82°

DAY	SUNRISE	SUNSET
Today	6:31 AM	5:46 PM
Tuesday	6:32 AM	5:47 PM
Wednesday	6:32 AM	5:47 PM
Thursday	6:33 AM	5:47 PM
Friday	6:33 AM	5:48 PM

DAY	MOONRISE	MOONSET	MOONRISE
Today	-	12:09 AM	12:45 PM
Tuesday	-	1:04 AM	1:25 PM
Wednesday	-	2:00 AM	2:06 PM
Thursday	-	2:58 AM	2:51 PM
Friday	-	4:00 AM	3:40 PM

AROUND THE GLOBE		▲ ▼ °F
Auckland	Partly Cloudy	43° / 36°
Beijing	Sunny	30° / 18°
Hong Kong	Cloudy	66° / 64°
Honolulu	Partly Cloudy	78° / 70°
London	Showers	46° / 37°
Los Angeles	Sunny	77° / 51
Manila	Partly Cloudy	84° / 72°
Melbourne	Sunny	77° / 55°
Miami	Sunny	70° / 63°
New York	Partly Cloudy	35° / 26°
Osaka	Partly Cloudy	50° / 37°
Paris	Showers	43° / 36°
Busan	Partly Cloudy	50° / 32°
Rome	Showers	55° / 54°
Salem	Sunny	58° / 36°
San Francisco	Sunny	62° / 46°
Seoul	Mostly Cloudy	37° / 19°
Tokyo	Cloudy	48° / 34°
Washington, DC	Partly Cloudy	39° / 29°

TIDES: SAIPAN HARBOR TODAY		FEET
12:26 AM	Low Tide	1.28
7:26 AM	High Tide	0.07
2:34 PM	Low Tide	1.80
9:18 PM	High Tide	0.66

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SUBSCRIPTION Published Monday to Friday, Saipan Tribune offers door-to-door on-island delivery at an annual rate of $180. For additional subscription information, call (670) 235-8747 or 235-2769, or fax 235-3740.

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FLIGHT SCHEDULE AS OF DECEMBER 1, 2024

DEPARTURES

SAIPAN-GUAM (GUM)

UA076	9:50AM	10:35AM	Daily

SAIPAN- NARITA (NRT)

UA824	1:20PM	4:00PM	1, 3, 5

GUAM-MANILA (MNL)

PR 111	5:55AM	7:55AM	Daily
UA183	7:55PM	9:50PM	Daily
UA193	7:55PM	11:50PM	2, 5 via Palau

SAIPAN-MANILA (MNL)

7C3218/2305	2:45AM	10:20PM	Daily via Incheon
UA076/183 Guam	9:50AM	9:50PM	Daily via
UA076/193	9:50AM	11:50PM	2, 5 via Guam, Palau

SAIPAN-INCHEON (ICN)

TW308	2:30AM	6:25AM	Daily
7C3218	2:45AM	6:45AM	Daily from Dec 8
7C3212	4:35PM	8:25PM	Daily

SAIPAN-BUSAN (PUS)

7C3552	3:55AM	7:20AM	3, 6 from Dec 25

SAIPAN-HONG KONG (HKG)

HX77	3:05AM	5:55AM	1, 5

ARRIVALS

GUAM (GUM)-SAIPAN

UA174	8:00AM	8:45AM	Daily

NARITA (NRT)-SAIPAN

UA825	5:30PM	10:05PM	2, 4, 7

MANILA (MNL)-GUAM

UA156	00:40AM	6:25AM	3, 6
PR110	10:05PM	3:55AM+1	Daily
UA192	10:40PM	6:30AM+1	2, 5 via Palau
UA184	10:55PM	4:40AM+1	1, 3, 4, 6, 7

MANILA (MNL)-SAIPAN

UA156	00:40AM	8:45AM	3, 6 via Guam
UA192/174	10:40PM	8:45AM+1	2, 5 via Palau, Guam
UA184/174	10:55PM	8:45AM +1	1, 3, 4, 6,7 via Guam
7C2306/3407	11:20PM	3:30PM+1	Daily

INCHEON (ICN)-SAIPAN

7C3211	10:10AM	3:30PM	Daily
TW307	8:00PM	1:30AM+1	Daily
7C3217	8:10PM	1:40AM+1	Daily from Dec 8

BUSAN (PUS)-SAIPAN

7C3551	9:25PM	2:50AM+1	2, 5 from Dec 25

HONG KONG (HKG)-SAIPAN

HX76	6:25PM	1:35AM+1	4, 7

LEGEND: Days: Monday (1), Tuesday (2), Wednesday (3), Thursday (4), Friday (5), Saturday (6) and Sunday (7); UA United Airlines; PR, Philippine Airlines; TW, T'Way Air; OZ, Asiana Airlines; 7C, Jeju Air; BX, Air Busan • ETD: Estimated Time of Departure; ETA: Estimated Time of Arrival. *(The Saipan Tribune is not responsible for any changes in the schedule.)*

STAR MARIANAS AIR, INC.

FLIGHT SCHEDULE AS OF JANUARY 2, 2024

SAIPAN TO ROTA

FLIGHT #	FROM	TO	DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
1301	SAIPAN	ROTA	08:30	09:00	Daily
1302	SAIPAN	ROTA	10:30	11:00	Daily
1303	SAIPAN	ROTA	15:30	16:00	Daily

ROTA TO SAIPAN

FLIGHT #	FROM	TO	DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
3101	ROTA	SAIPAN	9:30	10:00	Daily
3102	ROTA	SAIPAN	11:30	12:00	Saturday & Sunday
3103	ROTA	SAIPAN	13:30	14:00	Monday To Friday
3104	ROTA	SAIPAN	16:30	17:00	Daily

ROTA TO GUAM

FLIGHT #	FROM	TO	DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
3401	ROTA	GUAM	11:30	12:00	Monday To Friday

GUAM TO ROTA

FLIGHT #	FROM	TO	DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
4301	GUAM	ROTA	12:30	13:00	Monday To Friday

SAIPAN TO TINIAN

FLIGHT #	FROM	TO	DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
1201	SAIPAN	TINIAN	7:30	7:45	Daily
1202	SAIPAN	TINIAN	8:00	8:15	Daily
1203	SAIPAN	TINIAN	9:00	9:15	Daily
1204	SAIPAN	TINIAN	10:00	10:15	Daily
1206	SAIPAN	TINIAN	14:00	14:15	Daily
1207	SAIPAN	TINIAN	15:00	15:15	Daily
1208	SAIPAN	TINIAN	16:00	16:15	Daily
1209	SAIPAN	TINIAN	17:00	17:15	Daily

TINIAN TO SAIPAN

FLIGHT #	FROM	TO	DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
2101	TINIAN	SAIPAN	8:00	8:15	Daily
2102	TINIAN	SAIPAN	8:30	8:45	Daily
2103	TINIAN	SAIPAN	9:30	9:45	Daily
2104	TINIAN	SAIPAN	10:30	10:45	Daily
2106	TINIAN	SAIPAN	14:30	14:45	Daily
2107	TINIAN	SAIPAN	15:30	15:45	Daily
2108	TINIAN	SAIPAN	16:30	16:45	Daily
2109	TINIAN	SAIPAN	17:30	17:45	Daily

Nation

Trump isn't back in office but he's already pushing his agenda, negotiating with world leaders

By JILL COLVIN
Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP)—He's making threats, traveling abroad and negotiating with world leaders.

Donald Trump has more than a month and a half to go before he's sworn in for a second term. But the Republican president-elect is already moving aggressively not just to fill his Cabinet and outline policy goals, but to achieve those priorities.

Trump has threatened to impose a 25% tariff on goods from Canada and Mexico, prompting emergency calls and a visit from Canada's prime minister that resulted in what Trump claimed were commitments from both U.S. allies on new border security measures.

The incoming president has warned there will be "ALL HELL TO PAY" if, before his inauguration on Jan. 20, 2025, Hamas does not release the hostages being held in Gaza . He has threatened to block the purchase of U.S. Steel by a Japanese company, warning "Buyer Beware!!!"

And this weekend, Trump was returning to the global stage, joining a host of other foreign leaders for the reopening of the Notre Dame Cathedral five years after it was ravaged by a fire. On Saturday, he met with French President Emmanuel Macron—joined at the last minute by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy — and had plans to see Britain's Prince William also in Paris.

Absent in Paris: lame duck President Joe Biden, who has largely disappeared from headlines, except when he issued a pardon of his son, Hunter, who was facing sentencing for gun crimes and tax evasion. First lady Jill Biden is attending in his place.

"I think you have seen more happen in the last two weeks than you've seen in the last four years. And we're not even there yet," Trump said in an over-the-top boast at an awards ceremony Thursday night.

For all of Trump's bold talk, though, it is unclear how many of his efforts will bear fruit.

AP

French President Emmanuel Macron, left, hugs President-elect Donald Trump as he arrives at the Elysee Palace, Saturday, Dec. 7, 2024 in Paris.

Breaking precedent

The pre-inauguration threats and deal-making are highly unusual, like so much of what Trump does, said Julian Zelizer, a political historian at Princeton University.

"Transitions are always a little complicated in this way. Even though we talk about one president at a time," he said, "the reality is one president plus. And that plus can act assertively sometimes."

Zelizer said that is particularly true of Trump, who was president previously and already has relationships with many foreign leaders such as Macron, who invited both Trump and Biden to Paris this weekend as part of the Notre Dame celebration.

"Right now he's sort of governing even though he's not the president yet. He's having these public meetings with foreign leaders, which aren't simply introductions. He's staking out policy and negotiating things from drug trafficking to tariffs," Zelizer said.

Foreign leader meetings

Trump already has met with several foreign leaders, in addition to a long list of calls. He hosted Argentinian President Javier Milei in Florida at his Mar-a-Lago club in November. After the tariff threat, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau made a pilgrimage to Mar-a-Lago for a three-hour dinner meeting. Canadian officials later said the country is ready to make new investments in border security, with plans for more helicopters, drones and law enforcement officers.

Last Sunday, Trump dined with Sara Netanyahu, wife of the Israeli prime minister.

Incoming Trump aides have also been meeting with their future foreign counterparts.

On Wednesday, several members of Trump's team, including incoming national security adviser Mike Waltz, met with Andriy Yermak, a top aide to Zelenskyy, in Washington, as Ukraine tries to win support for its ongoing efforts to defend itself from Russian invasion, according to a person familiar with the meeting. Yermak also met with Trump officials in Florida, he wrote on X.

That comes after Trump's incoming Middle East envoy, Steve Witkoff, traveled to Qatar and Israel for high-level talks about a cease-fire and hostage deal in Gaza, according to a U.S official familiar with the efforts, meeting with the prime ministers of both countries. The official was not authorized to publicly discuss the matter and spoke on condition of anonymity.

One president, two voices

There is no prohibition on incoming officials or nominees meeting with foreign officials, and it is common and fine for them to do so—unless those meetings are designed to subvert or otherwise impact current U.S. policy.

Trump aides were said to be especially cognizant of potential conflicts given their experience in 2016, when interactions between Trump allies and Russian officials came under scrutiny. That included a phone call in which Trump's incoming national security adviser, Michael Flynn, discussed new sanctions with Russia's ambassador to the United States, suggesting things would improve after Trump became president. Flynn was later charged with lying to the FBI about the conversation.

Trump's incoming press secretary Karoline Leavitt said that, "All transition officials have followed applicable laws in their interactions with foreign nationals."

She added: "World leaders recognize that President Trump is returning to power and will lead with strength to put the best interests of the United States of America first again. That is why many foreign leaders and officials have reached out to correspond with President Trump and his incoming team."

Such efforts can nonetheless cause complications.

If, say, Biden is having productive conversations on a thorny foreign policy issue and Trump weighs in, that could make it harder for Biden "because people are hearing two different voices" that may be in conflict, Zelizer said.

Leaders like Russia's Vladimir Putin and Netanyahu may also anticipate a more favorable incoming administration and wait Biden out, hoping for more a better deal.

Coordination between incoming and outgoing administrations

It also remains unclear how extensively the Biden administration has been kept apprised of Trump transition efforts.

Although there is no requirement that an incoming administration coordinate calls and meetings with foreign officials with the State Department or National Security Council, that has long been considered standard practice. That is, in part, because transition teams, particularly in their early days and weeks, do not always have the latest information about the state of relations with foreign nations and may not have the resources, including interpretation and logistical ability, to handle such meetings efficiently.

Still, the Biden and Trump teams have been talking, particularly on the Middle East, with the incoming and outgoing administrations having agreed to work together on efforts to free hostages who remain in held in Gaza, according to a U.S. official, who, like others, was not authorized to comment publicly about the sensitive talks and spoke on condition of anonymity.

That includes conversations between Witkoff and Biden's foreign policy team as well as Waltz and Biden national security adviser Jake Sullivan.

Last month, Biden administration officials said they had kept Trump's team closely apprised of efforts to broker a ceasefire deal between Israel and Hezbollah on the Israel-Lebanon border.

"I just want to be clear to all of our adversaries, they can't play the incoming Trump administration off of the Biden administration. I'm regularly talking to the Biden people. And so, this is not a moment of opportunity or wedges for them," Waltz said Friday in a Fox Business interview.

But when it comes to immigration, Biden administration officials haven't been entirely in the loop on discussions around how to execute on Trump's pledge to deport millions of migrants, according to four administration officials with knowledge of the transition who spoke on condition of anonymity. That's not terribly surprising given how differently the teams view migration.

Taking credit already

Trump's team, meanwhile, is already claiming credit for everything from gains in the stock and cryptocurrency markets to a decision by Walmart to roll back diversity, equity and inclusion policies Trump opposes.

"Promises Kept—And President Trump Hasn't Even Been Inaugurated Yet," read one press release that claimed, in part, that both Canada and Mexico have already pledged "immediate action" to help "stem the flow of illegal immigration, human trafficking, and deadly drugs entering the United States."

Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum has stopped short of saying Trump mischaracterized their call in late November. But she said Friday that Trump "has his own way of communicating, like when we had the phone call and he wrote that we were going to close the border. That was never talked about in the phone call."

Earlier this week, Mexico carried out what it claimed was its largest seizure of fentanyl pills ever. Seizures over the summer had been as little as 50 grams per week, and after the Trump call, they seized more than a ton.

Security analyst David Saucedo said that "under the pressure by Donald Trump, it appears President Claudia Sheinbaum's administration is willing to increase the capture of drug traffickers and drug seizures that Washington is demanding."

Biden, too, tried to take credit for the seizure in a statement Friday night.

World

Insurgents reach gates of Syria's capital, threatening to upend decades of Assad rule

BEIRUT (AP)—Insurgents' stunning march across Syria accelerated Saturday with news that they had reached the gates of the capital and that government forces had abandoned the central city of Homs. The government was forced to deny rumors that President Bashar Assad had fled the country.

The loss of Homs is a potentially crippling blow for Assad. It stands at an important intersection between Damascus, the capital, and Syria's coastal provinces of Latakia and Tartus—the Syrian leader's base of support and home to a Russian strategic naval base.

The pro-government Sham FM news outlet reported that government forces took positions outside Syria's third-largest city, without elaborating. Rami Abdurrahman who heads the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, said Syrian troops and members of different security agencies have withdrawn from the city, adding that rebels have entered parts of it.

The insurgency announced later Saturday that it had taken over Homs. The city's capture is a major victory for the rebels, who have already seized the cities of Aleppo and Hama, as well as large parts of the south, in a lightning offensive that began Nov. 27. Analysts said rebel control of Homs would be a game-changer.

The rebels' moves around Damascus, reported by the monitor and a rebel commander, came after the Syrian army withdrew from much of southern part of the country, leaving more areas, including several provincial capitals, under the control of opposition fighters.

AP

Syrian opposition fighters remove a government Syrian flag from an official building in Salamiyah, east of Hama, Syria Syria, Saturday Dec. 7, 2024.

For the first time in the country's long-running civil war, the government now has control of only three of 14 provincial capitals: Damascus, Latakia and Tartus.

The advances in the past week were among the largest in recent years by opposition factions, led by a group that has its origins in al-Qaida and is considered a terrorist organization by the U.S. and the United Nations. In their push to overthrow Assad's government, the insurgents, led by the Hayat Tahrir al-Sham group, or HTS, have met little resistance from the Syrian army.

The rapid rebel gains, coupled with the lack of support from Assad's erstwhile allies, posed the most serious threat to his rule since the start of the war.

The U.N.'s special envoy for Syria, Geir Pedersen, on Saturday called for urgent talks in Geneva to ensure an "orderly political transition." Speaking to reporters at the annual Doha Forum in Qatar, he said the situation in Syria was changing by the minute. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, whose country is Assad's chief international backer, said he feels "sorry for the Syrian people."

In Damascus, people rushed to stock up on supplies. Thousands went to Syria's border with Lebanon, trying to leave the country.

Many shops in the capital were shuttered, a resident told The Associated Press, and those still open ran out of staples such as sugar. Some were selling items at three times the normal price.

"The situation is very strange. We are not used to that," the resident said, insisting on anonymity, fearing retributions.

"People are worried whether there will be a battle (in Damascus) or not."

It was the first time that opposition forces reached the outskirts of Damascus since 2018, when Syrian troops recaptured the area following a yearslong siege. The U.N. said it was moving noncritical staff outside the country as a precaution.

Syria's state media denied social media rumors that Assad left the country, saying he is performing his duties in Damascus.

He has had little, if any, help from his allies. Russia, is busy with its war in Ukraine. Lebanon's Hezbollah, which at one point sent thousands of fighters to shore up Assad's forces, has been weakened by a yearlong conflict with Israel. Iran has seen its proxies across the region degraded by regular Israeli airstrikes.

U.S. President-elect Donald Trump on Saturday posted on social media that that the United States should avoid engaging militarily in Syria.

Pedersen said a date for talks in Geneva on the implementation a U.N. resolution, adopted in 2015, and calling for a Syrian-led political process, would be announced later. The resolution calls for the establishment of a transitional governing body, followed by the drafting of a new constitution and ending with U.N.-supervised elections.

Later Saturday, foreign ministers and senior diplomats from eight key countries, including Saudi Arabia, Russia, Egypt, Turkey and Iran, along with Pederson, gathered on the sidelines of the Doha Summit to discuss the situation in Syria.

In a statement issued late Saturday, the participants affirmed their support for a political solution to the Syrian crisis "that would lead to the end of military activity and protect civilians." They also agreed on the importance of strengthening international efforts to increase aid to the Syrian people.

Rami Abdurrahman, who heads the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, an opposition war monitor, said insurgents were in the Damascus suburbs of Maadamiyah, Jaramana and Daraya. Opposition fighters were marching toward the Damascus suburb of Harasta, he added.

A commander with the insurgents, Hassan Abdul-Ghani, posted on the Telegram messaging app that opposition forces had begun the "final stage" of their offensive by encircling Damascus.

HTS controls much of northwest Syria and in 2017 set up a "salvation government" to run day-to-day affairs in the region. In recent years, HTS leader Abu Mohammed al-Golani has sought to remake the group's image, cutting ties with al-Qaida, ditching hard-line officials and vowing to embrace pluralism and religious tolerance.

Trump welcomed by Macron to Paris with presidential pomp and joined by Zelenskyy for talks

PARIS (AP)—French President Emmanuel Macron welcomed Donald Trump to Paris on Saturday with a full dose of presidential pomp as the two held a hastily arranged meeting with Ukraine's Volodymyr Zelenskyy before celebrating the grand reopening of the Notre Dame Cathedral.

On a day that mixed pageantry with attention to pressing global problems, the once and future American president was warmly embraced by Macron upon arriving at the Elysee Palace.

"It's a great honor for French people to welcome you five years later," Macron told Trump. "Welcome back again."

Trump said it was a "very great honor" to be there, while hinting at challenges ahead.

"It certainly seems like the world is going a little crazy right now. And we'll be talking about that," Trump said.

An actual red carpet was rolled out for Trump as Macron bestowed the kind of full diplomatic welcome that France offers sitting American presidents, complete with trumpets blaring and members of the Republican Guard in full uniform. It was a clear sign that even though Trump doesn't take office until Jan. 20, 2025, Macron and other European leaders are already working to win his favor and treating him as America's representative on the world stage.

President Joe Biden declined an invitation to attend the Notre Dame ceremony, five years after a devastating fire, with the White House citing a scheduling conflict. First lady Jill Biden was the official U.S. representative in his place.

Macron and leaders across Europe are trying to persuade the president-elect to maintain support for Ukraine in its defense against Russia's invasion. Macron's office said the war, along with conflicts in the Mideast, would be discussed.

As Trump arrived at the official residence of the French president, Macron went out of his way to project an image of close ties, offering handshakes and plenty of back-patting for the cameras.

In a video posted later on X, Macron could be heard asking Trump: "You remember?" as both men entered a reception room.

"I remember," Trump answered.

Trump spent about 90 minutes inside, meeting first with Macron before they were joined by Zelenskyy for about 35 minutes.

Macron had long planned to meet separately with Zelenskyy. The French president's office said the three-way talks were proposed by Macron and arranged shortly before Trump's arrival. Trump has pledged to end the war in Ukraine swiftly but has not specified how, raising concerns in Kyiv about what terms may be laid out for any future negotiations.

A person familiar with Trump's plans had said before the meeting was announced that while Trump and Zelenskyy were attending the cathedral ceremony and surrounding events and probably would interact, Trump's transition team had not worked with the Ukrainians to schedule formal talks.

After the place meeting, a Trump senior transition official did not push back on the idea that it had come together at the last minute, but said it had been "discussed fully and agreed to" and that Trump had been "fully briefed" ahead of time.

The three leaders spoke in English, and translator was in the room, according to a French official.

Accompanying Trump to Paris was a small contingent of advisers that included incoming chief of staff Susie Wiles, along with Steve Witkoff, a longtime friend and real estate investor whom Trump has tapped as his special envoy to the Middle East, and Massad Boulos, who is the father-in-law of Trump's daughter Tiffany and will serve as senior adviser on Arab and Middle Eastern affairs.

The group did not appear to include anyone with expertise on Ukraine.

"United States, Ukraine and France. Together on this historic day. United for Notre-Dame. Let's continue to work together for peace and security," Macron wrote on X afterward.

Trump's victory last month threw into doubt the Biden administration's flow of money and arms to Ukraine—aid bolstered even more on Saturday by U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin's announcement of a $988 million package that brings American military support to more than $62 billion since Russia's invasion in February 2022.

Trump has characterized Zelenskyy as "the greatest salesman on Earth" for winning billions in U.S. aid. Trump also has said he work out a peace deal between Russia and Ukraine within a day of taking office and has promoted his good relationship with Russian President Vladimir Putin.

In an effort to build trust with the incoming U.S. administration, Zelenskyy's top aide Andriy Yermak met key members of Trump's team on a two-day trip to the U.S. earlier this week.

Life & Style

NEARLY 20 YEARS AFTER THEFT

Ruby slippers worn by Garland in 'The Wizard of Oz' to be auctioned

MINNEAPOLIS (AP)—Nearly two decades after a pair of ruby slippers that were worn by Judy Garland in "The Wizard of Oz" were stolen from a Minnesota museum, the iconic shoes are set to be auctioned off to the highest bidder Saturday.

Heritage Auctions estimates the slippers will fetch $3 million or more. Online bidding opened last month and by Friday had reached $1.55 million, or $1.91 million including the buyer's premium, a commission that the buyer pays, said Robert Wilonsky, a vice president with the Dallas-based auction house. Over 800 people were tracking the slippers, and the company's web page for the auction had hit nearly 43,000 page views by Thursday, he said.

As Rhys Thomas, author of the book, "The Ruby Slippers of Oz," puts it, the sequined shoes from the beloved 1939 musical have seen "more twists and turns than the Yellow Brick Road."

They were on display at the Judy Garland Museum in her hometown of Grand Rapids, Minnesota, in 2005 when Terry Jon Martin used a hammer to smash the glass of the museum's door and display case.

Their whereabouts remained a mystery until the FBI recovered them in 2018. Martin, now 77, who lives near Grand Rapids in northern Minnesota, wasn't publicly exposed as the thief until he was indicted in May 2023. He pleaded guilty in October 2023. He was in a wheelchair and on supplementary oxygen when he was sentenced last January to time served because of his poor health.

AP

Ruby slippers once worn by Judy Garland in the "The Wizard of Oz," are displayed at a news conference, Sept. 4, 2018, at the FBI office in Brooklyn Center, Minn.

His attorney, Dane DeKrey, explained ahead of sentencing that Martin, who had a long history of burglary and receiving stolen property, was attempting to pull off "one last score" after an old associate with connections to the mob told him the shoes had to be adorned with real jewels to justify their $1 million insured value. But a fence — a person who buys stolen goods — later told him the rubies were just glass, DeKrey said. So Martin got rid of the slippers. The attorney didn't specify how.

Nobel Literature Prize winner Han Kang talks about how writing connects her to readers

STOCKHOLM (AP) — South Korean author Han Kang, this year's winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature, spoke passionately on Saturday about the process of writing and her evolution as a writer—all the way back to when she was 8 years old.

AP

Nobel laureate in literature Han Kang speaks during this year's Nobel Prize lecture in literature at the Swedish Academy on Saturday, Dec. 7, 2024 in Stockholm, Sweden.

Han, the first Asian woman and the first South Korean writer to win the Nobel literature prize, was delivering her Nobel lecture in Stockholm, the Swedish capital. She described in a soft-spoken voice how in January she found an old shoe box containing several several diaries dating back to her childhood.

Among the stack of journals, she found a poem about love she had written. "The lines penned by my eight-year-old self were suitably innocent and unpolished," she said.

Han was awarded for her novels, including "The Vegetarian" and "Human Acts," that explore the pain of being human and the scars of Korea's turbulent history. She is known for her experimental and often disturbing stories that incorporate the brutal moments of modern South Korea.

The Nobel Committee praised Han "for her intense poetic prose that confronts historical traumas and exposes the fragility of human life."

The author spoke Saturday about how she involves all of her senses in the creation of some of her best known works.

"When I write, I use my body," she said. "I use all the sensory details of seeing, of listening, of smelling, of tasting, of experiencing tenderness and warmth and cold and pain, of noticing my heart racing and my body needing food and water, of walking and running, of feeling the wind and rain and snow on my skin, of holding hands."

Specially minted Paul McCartney UK coins to go on sale as part of legends collection

LONDON (AP)—Beatles legend Paul McCartney is being honored in a specially minted British coin collection.

The Royal Mint, which has struck the coins of monarchs from Alfred the Great in the ninth century through to King Charles III, revealed Friday that it is launching a McCartney coin collection for collectors to buy.

On one side of the coins, as is custom, will be the king. On the other, it will be all about McCartney's career in the wake of the Beatles split in 1970.

The Royal Mint said the range will come in a variety of finishes as well as colored editions. The most valuable one will be the 2-ounce gold proof coin, which will have a face value of 200 pounds ($255), but will go on sale at a recommended retail price of 5,890 pounds ($7,510).

Though legal tender, but with the price differential, it's unlikely—if not irrational—for anyone using the coins in everyday to use them to pay for, say, a McCartney concert.

Among other features, the coins feature McCartney's iconic Magic Piano. a multicolored upright he first used in 1967 while still in arguably the greatest band of all with John Lennon, George Harrison and Ringo Starr. A replica was made for McCartney's 1989/1990 world tour and been used in subsequent tours.

There are other references too, including piano notes chosen by McCartney, his famous Höfner Violin Bass guitar, the logo of his post-Beatles band, Wings, as well as his signature.

"This feels like a huge honor," McCartney said. "It's not anything I would have ever expected to happen when I was a kid."

The Royal Mint also said it has created a special edition plectrum-shaped version of the coin to gift to the 82-year-old McCartney, who in his early days played with pennies as guitar picks.

Husband has spent a year pretending he held a job

DEAR ABBY: My husband and I have been married 10 years and in a relationship for 20. I just found out that for more than a year he has been lying about working. He pretended he had a part-time contracting job and has been using our savings to pass as income from this fictional job.

Over the past year, we made a lot of financial decisions based on the assumption that he was employed, which has left us in a tight situation. He initially denied it when I confronted him and even provided fake documents about his "job" before finally coming clean. I'm feeling many emotions because of this betrayal, and I am unsure about how to proceed. Can you guide me?

DUPED IN CALIFORNIA

DEAR DUPED: Your husband may have been embarrassed about his job loss, which is why he deceived you. What was he doing when he was supposedly working? His (and your) problems may go beyond the financial bind you are now in. Is your husband trying to find another job? Why was he let go?

Contact a CPA or financial adviser and ask what you need to do to get back on firm financial footing. You didn't mention whether you are employed, but if you aren't, it's time to find a job. Once that's done, marriage counseling is crucial.

■■■

DEAR ABBY: My last parent passed away 24 years ago, and my brothers and sisters went their separate ways. We were not close in our younger years. I'm the youngest, so it was pretty hard on me to suddenly have no birth family, so to speak.

A couple of years ago, my estranged brother and I reconnected. We have a lot in common, and my husband and children really like him. The problem is, when he has been drinking, he calls me terrible names. It hurts me because I don't know why. It can be a great day, and then suddenly something sets him off.

I want to say something to him, but I would hate to make him mad and cause our sibling relationship to go sideways again. I feel everything I am thinking of saying will hurt our friendship. I need some sound advice, and I promise to take it.

CONFLICTED SIS

DEAR SIS: I hope you realize that what you have described is one of the classic symptoms of alcoholism. The next time you and your brother get together and there is alcohol involved, press the record button on your cellphone so you can play it for him when he sobers up. Then tell him that in the future, you prefer he not drink anything stronger than punch when you are together.

■■■

DEAR ABBY: I've always connected with my significant other's parent. But now I am emotionally more connected to them than to my significant other. Is this healthy, or am I cheating on my S.O.?

CONFUSED IN THE MIDWEST

DEAR CONFUSED: When you wrote "emotionally connected," did you mean you have more in common with your S.O.'s parent than with your S.O., or that you are physically attracted? If it's the latter, end the romance. If you don't, it will cause chaos in your S.O.'s family and likely not end well for any of you.

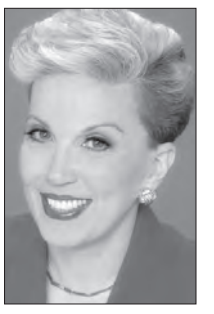
■■■

To order "How to Write Letters for All Occasions," send your name and mailing address, plus check or money order for $8 (U.S. funds) to: Dear Abby—Letter Booklet, P.O. Box 447, Mount Morris, IL 61054-0447. (Shipping and handling are included in the price.)

DEAR ABBY

BY ABIGAIL VAN BUREN

UNIVERSAL PRESS SYNDICATE

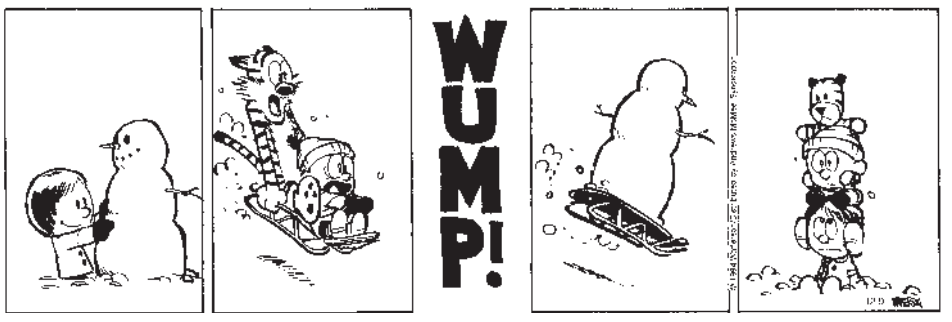


Dear Abby is written by Abigail Van Buren, also known as Jeanne Phillips, and was founded by her mother, Pauline Phillips. Contact Dear Abby at www.DearAbby.com or P.O. Box 69440, Los Angeles, CA 90069.

Pastimes

Calvin and Hobbes

By Bill Waterson



Garfield®

By Jim Davis

Adam@home

By Bryan Basset

WHERE'S KATY?
LYING UNDER THE CHRISTMAS TREE AGAIN.
I'M IN MY HAPPY PLACE
I GET IT. THE LIGHTS. THE SMELL.
YEP.
SO YOU'RE GOOD?
I HAVE SOME SAP IN MY EYE, BUT IT'S JOYOUS, MERRY SAP.

The Duplex

By Glenn McCoy

IT'S A LETTER FROM MY UNCLE KENNY. HE SAID HE HOPES TO DROP BY OVER THE HOLIDAYS.
ISN'T HE DOING 80 YEARS WITH NO PAROLE FOR BANK ROBBERY?
YEAH, I DON'T THINK WE NEED TO SAVE HIM A PLATE.

CROSSWORD

By Eugene Sheffer

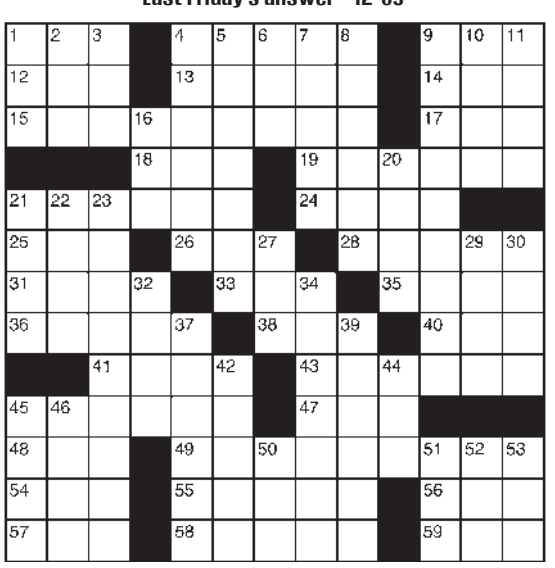
ACROSS
1 Actor Vigoda
4 Jazz phrases
9 Compass dir.
12 Fine, to NASA
13 Skate-boarder's leap
14 Smidgen
15 Anita Baker hit of 1986
17 — pickle
18 Payable
19 Insignia
21 Sans celebration
24 Vend
25 Bygone bird
26 Pop
28 Hands (out)
31 Cover of gloom
33 Felon's flight
35 Bike part
36 Wheat bundle
38 Napkin's perch
40 Tall tree
41 Heath
43 Multi-day prayer
45 Pester
47 Alias abbr.
48 Magic, on score-boards
49 Exit area for an actor
54 Conceit
55 Olympic skater Brian
56 Bankroll
57 Speck
58 Mike of "Shrek"
59 Hesitant sounds

DOWN
1 Small batteries
2 Fiddle stick
3 — out a living
4 Corpulent
5 Outlawed
6 Mel's Diner waitress
7 Change for a ten
8 Appeared to be
9 Painting of a ewer, e.g.
10 Logical
11 Wax-coated cheese
16 Sch. URL ender
20 Inky stain
21 Strike callers
22 Ark builder
23 Stephen King novel
27 The Cowboys, on a score-board
29 Ireland
30 Antitoxins
32 Mekong River nation
34 Ballpark boss
37 "— Prison Blues"
39 Fireplace tools
42 Hear again
44 Kilmer of "Top Gun"
45 Worked the soil
46 Golden Fleece ship
50 Enzyme suffix
51 Ram's mate
52 Distant
53 NFL six-pointers

Solution time: 21 mins.

A	B	A	■	R	I	D	■	F	R	I	T	Z
B	A	R	■	A	G	E	■	A	I	M	E	E
E	B	B	■	S	U	G	A	R	C	A	N	E
T	K	O	■	P	E	A	C	E	■	■	■	■
S	A	R	I	■	S	S	R	■	S	H	I	P
■	■	■	L	A	S	■	O	C	T	A	N	E
S	P	A	I	N	■	■	■	V	O	D	K	A
U	R	B	A	N	E	■	K	I	N	■	■	■
D	E	C	D	■	P	O	C	■	C	O	A	M
■	■	■	R	I	V	E	R	■	E	N	O	■
C	A	N	D	Y	C	A	N	E	■	L	I	L
O	P	E	R	A	■	T	O	N	■	L	T	D
P	R	E	E	N	■	C	N	D	■	S	A	Y

Last Friday's answer 12-09



STUMPED? For answers to today's crossword, call **1-900-226-5955!** 99¢ per minute, touch-tone/rotary phones. (18+ only.) A King Features service, NYC.

CELEBRITIES BORN ON THIS DAY: Felicity Huffman, 62; Donny Osmond, 67; Beau Bridges, 83; Dame Judi Dench, 90.

Happy Birthday: Communication will encourage compassion and understanding. Getting along regardless of differences will pave the way to progress. A willingness to see all sides of a situation and to offer concrete alternatives along with compromise will show those you associate with your ability to lead the way. Stepping up and making a difference is necessary, so don't sit back. Trust your instincts and be diligent when checking facts. Your numbers are 4, 17, 23, 28, 32, 35, 44, 47.

ARIES *(March 21-April 19):* Use your imagination. Pace yourself and budget wisely to ensure you get the highest return. A passionate discussion will clarify your position and ward off anyone trying to lead you astray. Keep your money, plans and possessions in a safe place. Focus on self-improvement, not trying to change others. ✪✪✪

TAURUS *(April 20-May 20):* Your actions will be scrutinized by onlookers and those trying to outmaneuver you. Refrain from letting anger set in when change is what to concentrate on if you want to get ahead. Reach out to someone you trust to offer expert advice. Leave nothing to chance or in someone else's hands. ✪✪✪

GEMINI *(May 21-June 20):* How you respond will significantly impact the outcome of a situation or partnership. Stick to the facts; sugarcoating will only make you look bad. Positive actions will make an impression on the people who can make your life easier and your dreams come true. Actions speak louder than words. ✪✪✪✪

CANCER *(June 21-July 22):* Use your imagination, and you'll find new outlets for your skills. Don't sell yourself short when you have plenty to offer. Put together an investment plan that will help you save for something unique. A joint venture looks promising if you put in the time and effort. ✪✪

LEO *(July 23-Aug. 22):* Engage in conversations that help you get to know your associates. Approach an expert who can offer insight that enables you to advance or use your attributes more effectively. Attending events will help expand your circle of friends and encourage you to try something new. ✪✪✪✪✪

VIRGO *(Aug. 23-Sept. 22):* A reserved attitude will serve you well. Be a good listener, and you'll gain insight into how you can control situations that are manipulated by people without your best interests in mind. Take a pass if uncertainty prevails. Discipline coupled with working alone will have its advantages. ✪✪✪

LIBRA *(Sept. 23-Oct. 22):* You'll achieve the most if you are confident, direct and persistent. Invest in your surroundings and make your space efficient and comfortable, and it will ensure that you do the most and get the best outcome. Don't give the competition a chance to outmaneuver you. ✪✪✪

SCORPIO *(Oct. 23-Nov. 21):* Refuse to let the demands others make stop you from following your heart, imagination and creative drive. Surround yourself with people who or places that inspire you to bring about lifestyle changes that make you feel good about yourself and your future. ✪✪✪✪

SAGITTARIUS *(Nov. 22-Dec. 21):* Put your time and energy into financial stabilization and physical fitness. A strong and healthy approach to security and peace of mind will help you recognize and distance yourself from grifters. Protect your money, reputation and position. Focus on looking and feeling your best. ✪✪✪

EUGENIA LAST

THE LAST WORD IN ASTROLOGY

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CAPRICORN *(Dec. 22-Jan. 19):* Establish how you want to move forward and how much it will cost. A change to your routine or schedule will offer beneficial results. Be open to suggestions, but set boundaries to deter someone from trying to take over. Establish ground rules and forge a plan. ✪✪

AQUARIUS *(Jan. 20-Feb. 18):* Envision and build what you want from scratch. Consider your wish list and turn it into something tangible—a business or functional living space. It's up to you to make your dreams come true. High energy and an astute mind will propel you, making it possible to achieve your goal. ✪✪✪✪

PISCES *(Feb. 19-March 20):* Confusion will plague you if you believe everything you hear. Someone will take advantage of you if you let them. Change begins with you; be the one to lead the way, and you won't be passed over when an opportunity to advance opens. Self-improvement is favored. 3 stars

Birthday Baby: You are friendly, opportunistic and gullible. You are generous and accommodating.

✪: Avoid conflicts; work behind the scenes. ✪✪: You can accomplish, but don't rely on others. ✪✪✪: Focus and you'll reach your goals. ✪✪✪✪: Aim high; start new projects. ✪✪✪✪✪: Nothing can stop you; go for gold.

SUDOKU

Conceptis Sudoku *By Dave Green*

9	3	5						
2			4	9	5		7	
	4	7	8		6			
	2			6	4	7	3	
7	6			1	9		5	2
		3			2			4
		1	6			5		7
6		2			3		8	
4				2	7		1	

Difficulty: ★ 12/9

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Sudoku is a number-placing puzzle based on a 9x9 grid with several given numbers. The object is to place the numbers 1 to 9 in the empty squares so that each row, each column and each 3x3 box contains the same number only once. The difficulty level of the Conceptis Sudoku increases from Monday to Saturday.

Friday's Answer

6	3	5	2	4	9	7	1	8
7	1	4	8	3	6	2	9	5
8	9	2	5	7	1	4	6	3
9	4	1	7	6	5	3	8	2
3	8	7	9	2	4	6	5	1
2	5	6	1	8	3	9	4	7
4	6	8	3	5	2	1	7	9
1	7	3	6	9	8	5	2	4
5	2	9	4	1	7	8	3	6

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Difficulty: ★★★★ 12/6

WONDERWORD

By DAVID OUELLET

HOW TO PLAY: All the words listed below appear in the puzzle — horizontally, vertically, diagonally and even backward. Find them, circle each letter of the word and strike it off the list. The leftover letters spell the **WONDERWORD.**

IT'S GREEN MONDAY! **Solution: 5 letters**

T	O	N	O	S	A	E	S	L	A	I	C	E	P	S
I	N	R	E	T	A	I	L	Y	A	D	I	L	O	H
M	L	U	D	Y	G	O	L	O	N	H	C	E	T	O
E	I	P	O	E	D	O	C	Y	S	U	B	E	R	P
Y	N	U	L	C	R	T	R	A	C	T	N	B	A	P
L	E	B	A	Y	C	E	B	S	N	R	T	U	N	I
D	T	L	E	V	V	A	A	E	E	I	E	S	S	N
N	A	I	D	I	R	M	M	T	D	E	T	I	A	G
E	N	C	L	G	T	N	N	E	A	S	O	N	C	N
I	O	E	A	S	O	I	R	A	S	U	M	E	T	I
R	D	I	I	R	L	C	E	T	R	E	E	S	I	P
F	N	R	I	G	I	F	T	S	O	R	R	S	O	P
O	H	V	N	E	D	R	A	G	U	Y	I	O	N	I
C	N	O	B	R	A	C	W	O	L	E	S	V	T	H
E	L	B	A	N	I	A	T	S	U	S	A	L	E	S

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Account, Arrive, Bargain, Business, Busy, Cart, Christmas, Code, Credit, Deal, Delivery, Donate, eBay, Eco-friendly, Environment, Garden, Gifts, Holiday, Internet, Low-carbon, Online, Order, Public, Remote, Retail, Reuse, Sales, Season, Shipping, Shopping, Specials, Stores, Sustainable, Technology, Time, Toys, Transaction, Water

Last Friday's answer : Statute

The NEW **Volume 77** can be purchased online at www.WonderWordBooks.com. or call 1-800-642-6480. (In Canada, call 1-855-232-2367)

Mobley scores career-high 41 points as Cavaliers beat Hornets

CHARLOTTE, N.C. (AP)—Evan Mobley scored a career-high 41 points, Donovan Mitchell added 18 points, eight rebounds and eight assists, and the Cleveland Cavaliers extended their strong start with a 116-102 victory over the injury-riddled Charlotte Hornets on Saturday.

Mobley scored 23 points as the Cavaliers built a 40-18 lead after the first quarter en route to their 21st victory in 24 games. The forward then had seven points in a late 12-2 surge as Cleveland held on.

Brandon Miller scored 24 points for Charlotte, which got as close as 104-100 with 5:05 left to play in its eighth straight loss.

Jamal Murray (hamstring), Aaron Gordon (calf) and Dario Saric (ankle) were all out for Denver, which left Jokic as something of a one-man show for the Nuggets. He took 38 shots from the field—also a career high—and had 16 rebounds and eight assists.

But Washington always had an answer.

The Wizards (3-18) won for the first time since Oct. 30. Their 16-game skid tied a franchise record.

Poole made a career-high nine 3-pointers, and Washington as a team made 16. Denver went 5 of 24, which is why the Nuggets couldn't fully take advantage of Jokic's dominance.

AP

Cleveland Cavaliers guard Donovan Mitchell pours water on forward Evan Mobley (4) during an post-game interview after an NBA basketball game against the Charlotte Hornets, Saturday, Dec. 7, 2024, in Charlotte, N.C.

WIZARDS 122, NUGGETS 113

WASHINGTON (AP)—Jordan Poole scored 39 points, and Washington overcame a career-high 56 by Nikola Jokic to beat Denver and snap their 16-game losing streak.

THUNDER 119, PELICANS 109

NEW ORLEANS (AP)—Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored 16 of his 31 points in the first quarter and Jalen Williams added 27 to power Oklahoma City to a victory over New Orleans.

The Thunder built a 77-51 halftime lead by dominating New Orleans in the paint and in transition, and won for the seventh time in eight games.

Dejounte Murray scored 26 points and Herb Jones added 24 for the Pelicans, who committed 18 turnovers and lost for the 16th time in 18 games.

New Orleans cut its deficit to 99-80 with by outscoring the Thunder 29-22 in third quarter and got as close as 114-105 with 3:31 left. The Thunder scored five straight to pull away.

PISTONS 120, KNICKS 111

NEW YORK (AP)—Cade Cunningham had 29 points, 15 assists and 10 rebounds, and Detroit beat New York.

Malik Beasley had 23 points off the bench and Jaden Ivey chipped in 16 for the Pistons, who snapped a three-game losing streak.

It was Cunningham's fifth triple-double of the season, three behind league leader Nikola Jokic.

Jalen Brunson had 31 points and 10 assists, and Mi

MAVERICKS 125, RAPTORS 118

TORONTO (AP)—Luka Doncic had 30 points, 13 rebounds and 11 assists for his second straight triple-double, Kyrie Irving scored 29 points and Dallas extended their winning streak to seven games with a win over Toronto.

Doncic's second triple-double of the season was the 79th of his career, moving him past Wilt Chamberlain and James Harden and into sole possession of seventh on the all-time list.

Klay Thompson scored 20 points as the Mavericks extended the NBA's longest active winning streak.

Doncic had 15 points, eight assists and six rebounds by halftime. He banked in a 35-foot 3-pointer at the second-quarter buzzer to give Dallas a 70-54 lead at the break.

GRIZZLIES 127, CELTICS 121

BOSTON (AP)—Ja Morant had 32 points, nine assists and nine rebounds and Memphis snapped a 10-game road losing streak in Boston with a win over the Celtics.

Jaren Jackson Jr. added 27 points and nine rebounds for Memphis, which won in TD Garden for the first time since Nov. 27, 2013. The Grizzlies have won eight of their last nine.

Jrue Holiday had 23 points for the Celtics, who went 18 for 60 from the 3-point line. Jaylen Brown and Payton Pritchard each finished with 22 points.

The Celtics erased a 14-point third-quarter deficit, taking a 97-94 lead early in the fourth. Memphis rallied and led 117-115 with less than four minutes to play. The Grizzlies then scored seven straight to get it back up to 124-115 and were able to close it out.

HEAT 121, SUNS 111

MIAMI (AP)—Bam Adebayo scored 25 points, Jimmy Butler added 24 and Miami moved back over the .500 mark by beating Phoenix.

Adebayo finished with 12 rebounds and eight assists for the Heat (11-10). Duncan Robinson scored 19 and Tyler Herro added 17 points, eight rebounds and seven assists for Miami, which outscored Phoenix 68-53 after halftime.

Royce O'Neale had 23 points for Phoenix (12-10), Devin Booker scored 21 and Grayson Allen finished with 16. Bradley Beal had 15 points for the Suns, who were outscored 62-32 in the paint.

NBA BRIEFS

Spurs' Zach Collins fined $35,000 by NBA for obscene gesture after ejection

NEW YORK (AP)—San Antonio Spurs center Zach Collins was fined $35,000 by the NBA on Saturday for making an obscene gesture on the court after being ejected. Collins was thrown out with 9:07 remaining in the second quarter of the Spurs' 140-113 home loss to Sacramento on Friday night. When he got back to the bench area, he turned back and extended his middle finger to the referee. Collins had been called for his third foul, then given a pair of technical fouls. He finished with two points.

NBA fines Celtics' Jaylen Brown $25,000 after his throat-slash gesture against Detroit

NEW YORK (AP)—Boston forward Jaylen Brown was fined $25,000 by the NBA for his throat-slash gesture after a dunk against Detroit on Wednesday night. NBA head of basketball operations Joe Dumars announced the penalty Friday. Brown was fined for what the NBA considered an "inappropriate gesture." It occurred right before the end of the first quarter when Brown threw down a two-handed dunk against Detroit's Isaiah Stewart. Brown then stared at Stewart for a few moments before moving his hand against his throat. Brown told the media after the 130-120 victory over the Pistons that he expected to hear from the NBA for his actions.

NBA fines Rockets' Udoka, Sengun and Eason for actions in loss to the Kings

NEW YORK (AP)—The NBA fined Houston Rockets coach Ime Udoka and center Alperen Sengun for their actions that led to ejections in a 120-111 loss to the Sacramento Kings on Tuesday night, and forward Tari Eason for an interaction with a fan following the game. The league announced Thursday that Udoka was fined $50,000 for confronting and directing profane language toward a game official, failing to leave the court in a timely manner after being ejected and public criticism of the officiating during his postgame news conference. Sengun was fined $15,000 for directing inappropriate language toward a game official. Eason was fined $35,000 for throwing a towel and directing inappropriate language in the direction of a fan in the stands after the game had finished. Udoka and Sengun were both assessed technical fouls and ejected with 1:52 remaining in the fourth quarter. Houston had won three straight and 10 of 12 games before the loss, which denied the Rockets the top seed in the NBA Cup quarterfinals.

Doncic moves into 7th place on NBA's triple-double list with 79th of career

TORONTO (AP)—Luka Doncic's 79th career triple-double moved the Dallas Mavericks star past some impressive NBA talent.

Doncic had 30 points, 13 rebounds and 11 assists for his second straight triple-double as the Mavericks extended their winning streak to seven games with a 125-118 win over the Toronto Raptors on Saturday.

This triple-double moved Doncic past Wilt Chamberlain and James Harden on the NBA's all-time list and into sole possession of seventh place.

Next in Doncic's sights? Mavericks head coach Jason Kidd, who had 107 triple-doubles in his 19-year NBA career.

"I guess I've got to sit him," Kidd joked of Doncic.

Don't count on that. Doncic will go for his third straight triple-double when the Mavs face Western Conference-leading Oklahoma City in an NBA Cup game on Tuesday night.

Doncic had 15 points, eight assists and six rebounds by halftime against the Raptors. He banked home a 35-foot 3-pointer at the second-quarter buzzer that gave Dallas a 70-54 lead at the break, and earlier threw a no-look, over-the-head assist to Irving for a 3-pointer in the first.

Doncic reached his triple-double on a defensive rebound with 1:58 left in the third. He had 21 points, 10 assists and 10 rebounds in Thursday's win at Washington.

"That's an incredible feat for Luka," Kidd said of Doncic's move past Chamberlain and Harden. "When you talk about his skill set, filling up the stat sheet, he's had two here, he can run them off. We always expect him to have a triple-double or we sometimes take him for granted for triple-doubles. I think right now you can see that he's starting to get into a groove."

Doncic further impressed his coach by throwing several long assists against Toronto, including some from under his own basket.

"It's just incredible, the ability, the strength to be able to throw it that far," Kidd said. "He probably could have been a quarterback for the Cowboys."

Campbell's 4th-down gambles help Lions beat Packers and clinch playoffs

DETROIT (AP)—Dan Campbell's gambles paid off.

Detroit went for it on fourth down for a fifth time to set up Jake Bates' 35-yard field goal as time expired, Jared Goff threw three touchdown passes and the Lions clinched a playoff spot with a 34-31 victory over the Green Bay Packers on Thursday night.

Campbell has been perhaps the NFL's most aggressive coach since taking over what was a league laughingstock in 2021, but he turned it up a notch against the Packers with a short-handed defense that he wanted to keep off the field.

"That was how I wanted to play that team with where we are at," Campbell said.

The NFC-best Lions (12-1) broke a franchise record with their 11th straight win — including two over the Packers (9-4)—to stay ahead of Minnesota (10-2) in the highly competitive NFC North.

"This will be one of those you'll never forget," Campbell said.

Campbell kept his offense on the field on a fourth-and-1 at the Green Bay 21 with 43 seconds left. David Montgomery ran for 7 yards, barely getting a handoff from Goff after the quarterback got his feet tangled up and was falling toward the turf.

"It's a bad feeling," Goff said.

The play ensured the Lions could try a field goal without giving Green Bay the ball back, and Bates hit his third-game winning kick this season.

"I just felt like we needed to end it on offense," Campbell said. "I did not want to give the ball back and I believed we could convert. I trust the O-line. I trust David."

Goff threw two touchdown passes on fourth-and-goal, one to Tim Patrick, who had two TD catches. He also threw an interception in the third quarter to set up one of Josh Jacobs' career-high matching three TD runs.

Goff found Jahymr Gibbs open in the end zone for a 2-yard pass on a fourth down with 11 seconds left in the first half to put Detroit ahead 17-7. Goff later connected with Patrick on a go-ahead, 1-yard touchdown pass midway through the fourth quarter.

Green Bay took advantage of the only time Campbell's aggressiveness didn't pan out, denying Gibbs on a fourth-down run late in the third quarter from the Detroit 31.

Jacobs scored for a third time on a 3-yard run on the ensuing drive.

"The risk was there," Campbell said.

Brandon McManus made a 32-yard field goal with 3:38 left to pull the Packers into a 31-all tie in a game that had four lead changes earlier in the second half.

"That's exactly the kind of game we expected," Green Bay coach Matt LaFleur said. "It was tough and it went back and forth. There were just a couple plays that didn't go our way."

The Lions' final drive began with Goff's 19-yard pass to Jameson Williams. He also connected with Amon-Ra St. Brown for 16 yards on the decisive possession. Goff finished 32 of 41 for 283 yards, and six Lions had at least five receptions, the first time that's happened in NFL history, according to OptaSTATS.

"They have great playmakers and they just get them the ball," LaFleur said. "Jared Goff is an excellent quarterback and we gave him time to throw."

Jordan Love was 12 of 20 for 206 yards with a touchdown pass to Tucker Kraft early in the third quarter.

"They have a really good offense, but so do we," Love said. "I don't think there was any extra pressure on us. We just got off to a slow start."

LaFleur lamented that someone holding the American flag during the national anthem ended up shouting at the Packers and had to be separated from them by officials before the game.

"He was yelling at our players and giving the throat-slash gesture," LaFleur said. "I've never seen anything like that. I would just like security to step in there and get him off the field."

AP

Detroit Lions quarterback Jared Goff (16) gestures before the start an NFL football game against the Green Bay Packers in Detroit, Thursday, Dec. 5, 2024.

NFL's next coaching cycle will feature an impressive list of candidates: Analysis

By ROB MAADDI
AP Pro Football Writer

The next NFL coaching cycle will feature an impressive list of candidates ranging from proven champions to up-and-coming coordinators.

Six-time Super Bowl winner Bill Belichick heads the list of well-known names that includes 2021 AP Coach of the Year Mike Vrabel. Don't count out Pete Carroll, and Robert Saleh could get another chance quickly.

Lions offensive coordinator Ben Johnson, Buccaneers OC Liam Cohen, Bills OC Joe Brady and Eagles OC Kellen Moore are among a lengthy list of young offensive-minded coaches who will garner plenty of interest. Lions DC Aaron Glenn, Dolphins DC Anthony Weaver, Chargers DC Jesse Minter and Panthers DC Ejiro Evero are among the coaches on the other side of the ball who'll receive attention.

Several former head coaches currently serving as coordinators also should be in the mix, including Chiefs defensive coordinator Steve Spagnuolo, Steelers OC Arthur Smith, Vikings DC Brian Flores, Broncos DC Vance Joseph and Commanders OC Kliff Kingsbury.

Potential college head coaches who could jump to the NFL include Notre Dame's Marcus Freeman and USC's Lincoln Riley. Of course, most college coaches say they're not going anywhere. Riley made that known Wednesday. Deion Sanders already said he's not leaving Colorado but never say never.

The Jets, Saints and Bears already fired their coaches. More teams will make a change. Since 2019, there have been 43 coaching changes. Sixteen of those coaches have already been fired, one retired and a few more could be on their way out.

Of the 43 hired over the past six coaching cycles, 10 previously were NFL head coaches and two were college head coaches. Of the remaining 31 hires, 25 were coordinators. Jerod Mayo (inside linebackers coach), Dan Campbell (tight ends coach), David Culley (passing game coordinator) and Zac Taylor (quarterbacks coach) made the leap from an assistant role. Antonio Pierce went from linebackers coach to interim coach to head coach in Las Vegas.

Eight teams hired new coaches after last season. The three teams who chose guys who were previous head coaches are currently sitting in a playoff position. Jim Harbaugh and the Los Angeles Chargers (8-4) hold the fifth seed in the AFC. Dan Quinn and the Washington Commanders (8-5) have the seventh spot in the NFC. Raheem Morris and the Atlanta Falcons (6-6) are tied for first in the NFC South with Tampa Bay but hold the tiebreaker because of a season sweep.

Rookie head coach Mike Macdonald has the Seattle Seahawks (7-5) sitting in first place in the NFC West.

The remaining first-year coaches are struggling. Pierce, Mayo, Brian Callahan (Titans) and Dave Canales (Panthers) are 11-38 combined.

A closer look at one coach from each category:

Former coach

Belichick is the biggest name of all, and drew headlines Thursday with news that he interviewed with the University of North Carolina for its coaching vacancy. Though he'll turn 73 before the start of the 2025 season, he's eager to get back on the job. Belichick needs to win 27 more games to break Don Shula's record for most regular-season victories. He's 15 wins away from passing Shula for all-time victories, including the postseason. Belichick only interviewed with the Falcons last cycle after leaving the Patriots. The main issue would be how much control he'd be willing to cede to the general manager. Belichick has stayed in the spotlight working in the media. He's showing a different side of his personality that could help him this time around. The Giants could be a fit if they fire Brian Daboll. Keep an eye on the Eagles should the team falter again down the stretch. Nick Sirianni just keeps winning but anything less than a Super Bowl in Philadelphia won't be considered a success.

Offensive coordinator

Johnson will likely be the most coveted young coach again this cycle. He has already interviewed with seven teams (Chargers, Colts, Commanders, Falcons, Panthers, Seahawks and Texans) over the past two seasons but chose to stay in Detroit to finish the job after the team fell short in the NFC championship game. The Lions lead the conference at 12-1 and are first in the NFL in scoring at 31.9 points per game. The Bears need a coach to help develop franchise QB Caleb Williams so they're an obvious landing spot. Another team that ends up with a pick to land a top QB in the draft would also have to be in the mix. It's going to be up to Johnson. His options will be unlimited.

Defensive coordinator

Minter followed Jim Harbaugh to the NFL from Michigan and has guided the league's stingiest defense. The Chargers are giving up just 15.7 points per game. Minter previously served as an assistant under John Harbaugh in Baltimore so he has been mentored by well-respected winning coaches.

College coach

Is it time for Prime Time? Sure, Sanders insists he's staying put. But suppose the team that drafts Shedeur Sanders to be its franchise QB offers a father-son opportunity. Or, maybe Jerry Jones calls the Hall of Fame cornerback who helped the Cowboys win their last Super Bowl title.

Juan Soto could decide on his next team this weekend

NEW YORK (AP) — Juan Soto appears on a timetable to decide on where to sign either before or during baseball's winter meetings in Dallas, which start Sunday and run until Dec. 12.

Soto met with the New York Yankees, New York Mets, Los Angeles Dodgers, Boston Red Sox and Toronto Blue Jays, a person familiar with the negotiations has said, speaking to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity because details were not announced.

Soto's agent, Scott Boras, asked teams to submit initial offers by Thanksgiving and says Soto has started to eliminate clubs from consideration.

AP

Free agent Juan Soto is likely to pick a new home soon.

"He's just got a lot of information to meld through," Boras said Tuesday after the Los Angeles Dodgers' news conference to introduce Blake Snell, another of his clients. "Juan is a very methodical thinker."

Soto is the top player available among this year's free agents. A four-time All-Star, Soto finished third in AL MVP voting after hitting .288 with 41 homers, 109 RBIs and 129 walks. He has a .285 career average with 201 homers, 592 RBIs and 769 walks over seven major league seasons.

Soto turned down a $440 million, 15-year offer from Washington in 2022, prompting the Nationals to trade him to San Diego, which then dealt him to the Yankees last December. Soto then combined with Aaron Judge to lead New York to the World Series, where the Yankees lost to the Dodgers.

In his pitch to teams, Boras highlighted that Soto joined Mickey Mantle as the only players with seven RBIs in a World Series at age 21 or younger when he was with Washington, and at 20 became the youngest player with five postseason homers. Soto's .906 postseason OPS through age 25 topped Mantle (.900) and Derek Jeter (.852).

DOC

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after a pandemic-induced hiatus.

This year's competition saw impressive performances, with Japanese rider—a doctor no less—Ryo Inoue reaching paradise at the finish line after going through hell with an impressive sub three-hour time of 2:58:12. Second place was countryman Michiya Suzuki at 3:04:31, and third went to the Netherlands' Rick Nobel with a time of 3:08:34.

The 40-year-old Inoue is no stranger to long, grueling races, having competed in 200-km events and raced for 11 years. This was his first visit to Saipan and his debut in the HOM. He said that he originally planned to race in Japan before this, but when it was canceled, he discovered HOM and decided to join.

The course and race, he said, "was very hard, but excellent." He wasn't in the lead the whole time but pushed hard after the Radar Tower turnaround and took the lead from there.

He compared Saipan's course and weather to races he's joined in Okinawa, Japan, and said that he'll be back next year to defend his title.

Meanwhile in the women's division, South Korea's Miso Kim snaked her way through the course for a repeat—this time shaving off 15 minutes from her time last year with 3:29:28. Last year, she clocked in at 3:44:21 even after crashing and enduring scrapes near the finish line.

Second place was Japan's Yukako Suzuki at 3:39:44, and third place was South Korea's Jiseon Jang with a time of 5:11:11. Jang, during the race, actually helped out a fellow biker who crashed and still managed to cross the finish line.

For Kim, she said through Google translate, "I remember falling down last year and having a really hard time, but this year was less difficult than last year. And as a Korean, I'm really proud of [winning] twice.

The course, she said, "Last year, it rained so [the road] was very slippery, but today, it was a little wet, but it was still clean and less slippery than last year. And the overall road surface felt very clean, so it felt really good to [race] on."

As to how she not only won first place again this year but also shaved off 15 minutes from her time, she said, "Well, I've been working out more consistently this year than last year, and there was a four-day stage race in Korea a month ago, so I think I've become a lot more prepared while preparing for that."

She then said that this race "was tough, but it was memorable, and I especially have fond memories of last [year's] party, and awards ceremony that I never had in Korea, so I will definitely come back."

The Top 3 in both categories earned $1,000, $800, and $500, respectively, while Inoue and Kim both won airplane tickets to come back next year and defend their title.

Results of the other divisions will be posted in the next issues of *Saipan Tribune.*

The race, jointly organized by the Marianas Visitors Authority and Northern Mariana Islands Cycling Federation, attracted cyclists from around the world to take on the island's challenging terrain. Participating countries and territories in this year's race were South Korea, Japan, Russia, Guam, USA, CNMI, and the Netherlands.

The race was sponsored by the TSL Foundation, Crowne Plaza Resort Saipan, United Airlines, Hawaiian Rock Product, Saipan Bike Pro, Seman Law Offices, Latte Built, and TurnKey Solutions. Event supporters were the Department of Public Safety, Department of Public Works, Department of Fire and Emergency Medical Services, and Division of Parks and Recreation.

ANTONI

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Oklahoma. Additionally, he was recognized as the District 4A-1 Offensive Newcomer of the Year, Oklahoma Preseason All-State First Team, and The Oklahoman's Class of 2025 Top Offensive Lineman.

He is also rated as the Top 45 Interior Offensive Line prospect nationally by ESPN (No. 33), On3 (No. 42), and 247Sports (No. 45)

Ogumoro's varsity high school football team is currently undefeated with 13 wins and has a chance to lead them to their first state championship.

He will then be on at the UT campus on Dec. 15 to be with his football team during the College Football Playoffs and have a chance to win a College Football National Championship.

Ogumoro said of his signing with Tennessee, "I was just grateful to be where I'm at and soaking everything in." He thanked all his family, coaches, teammates, and friends that were a part of his journey thus far, and looks forward to "the competition and getting better on and off the field."

His parents said of their son's signing, "We're very proud that he stayed true to his commitment to Tennessee and glad he's officially signed with the University of Tennessee to continue his academic and athletic career."

"We felt blessed and amazing! This is the culmination of years upon years of sweat, prayers and hardwork and seeing him take this first step into his collegiate career is such a blessing!" added Mayumi.

She also said, "And we'd like to thank every single one of his coaches that have put in the time and effort to train him the right way. They are a big piece of his story and without them he wouldn't be where he's at today! We'd also like to thank our family and friends who have been with us every step of the way supporting Antoni as he chased his dream. It's been a collaborative effort helping Antoni get to where he's at today and anyone who's played a part in his story, big or small, has our gratitude."

Ogumoro's grandparents are Ambrosio Ogumoro and Felicidad Kaipat Ogumoro of Capitol Hill and Rufino and Carol Aguon of Kagman. Rufino Aguon incidentally is Ambrose Ogumoro's former coach in the CNMI national basketball team.

KOBES

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The Umangs continued to display their ball-handling skills and accuracy as Mansfield sank another from long range. In the end, Mansfield totaled 10 points, while Lovan Ngeskebei scored 8, and Liam Duenas had 7 markers. For GES, Kileleman had the most points at 4, while Imperial had 3.

Head coach Francisco Mendiola said after the awards ceremony that it felt good to take home the championships despite falling short last year. He said that some of the players this year were the same from last and they said this time around, they "worked hard—even with the late practice start we had. We felt good that they listened to the coaches. I don't want them to just play ball, I want them to look good on the court."

Their strategy in the finals, he said, "was to play the basics—rebounds and a lot of putbacks—I don't know, somehow these guys are throwing 3-points in the championship game but before that, it's all about the perimeter high-percentage shot."

As for their opponent, he said, "they played three games today to reach the championship so maybe the fatigue got to them, but they played really hard."

He then thanked the students' parents and the school's admin and staff for cheering on and supporting the team throughout the season. He added, "thank you to *Saipan Tribune* for covering all elementary, middle school, and high school sports." Also, he thanked PSS Athletics' Nick Gross and staff for their hard work.

KobES 1 43 – Mansfield 10, Ngeskebei 8, Duenas 7, Cosmes 6, Defang 6, Okaruru 4, Alvarado 2.

GES 2 11 – Kileleman 4, Imperial 3, Borja 2, #8 2.

Scoring by quarters: 11-0, 19-7, 26-9, 43-11.

TRIBUNE SPORTS SCORES
NBA STANDINGS

EASTERN CONFERENCE

Atlantic Division	W	L	Pct	GB
Boston	19	5	.792	–
New York	14	9	.609	4½
Brooklyn	10	13	.435	8½
Toronto	7	17	.292	12
Philadelphia	6	15	.286	11½
Southeast Division				
Orlando	16	9	.640	–
Atlanta	13	11	.542	2½
Miami	11	10	.524	3
Charlotte	6	17	.261	9
Washington	3	18	.143	11
Central Division				
Cleveland	21	3	.875	–
Milwaukee	11	11	.500	9
Indiana	10	14	.417	11
Chicago	10	14	.417	11
Detroit	10	15	.400	11½

WESTERN CONFERENCE

Southwest Division	W	L	Pct	GB
Dallas	16	8	.667	–
Memphis	16	8	.667	–
Houston	15	8	.652	½
San Antonio	11	12	.478	4½
New Orleans	5	19	.208	11
Northwest Division				
Oklahoma City	18	5	.783	–
Minnesota	12	10	.545	5½
Denver	11	10	.524	6
Portland	8	15	.348	10
Utah	5	17	.227	12½
Pacific Division				
Golden State	13	9	.591	–
L.A. Clippers	14	10	.583	–
Phoenix	12	10	.545	1
L.A. Lakers	12	11	.522	1½
Sacramento	11	13	.458	3

BY THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

TRIBUNE SPORTS SCORES
NFL STANDINGS

AMERICAN CONFERENCE

East	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
y-Buffalo	10	2	0	.833	355	224
Miami	5	7	0	.417	232	266
N.Y. Jets	3	9	0	.250	225	268
e-New England	3	10	0	.231	221	307
South						
Houston	8	5	0	.615	308	288
Indianapolis	6	7	0	.462	267	298
Tennessee	3	9	0	.250	221	332
e-Jacksonville	2	10	0	.167	228	339
North						
Pittsburgh	9	3	0	.750	296	224
Baltimore	8	5	0	.615	383	318
Cincinnati	4	8	0	.333	335	340
Cleveland	3	9	0	.250	218	308
West						
x-Kansas City	11	1	0	.917	289	235
L.A. Chargers	8	4	0	.667	260	188
Denver	8	5	0	.615	305	234
e-Las Vegas	2	10	0	.167	223	333

NATIONAL CONFERENCE

East	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
Philadelphia	10	2	0	.833	320	218
Washington	8	5	0	.615	376	296
Dallas	5	7	0	.417	248	339
e-N.Y. Giants	2	10	0	.167	183	279
South						
Atlanta	6	6	0	.500	257	291
Tampa Bay	6	6	0	.500	335	296
New Orleans	4	8	0	.333	276	281
Carolina	3	9	0	.250	217	366
North						
x-Detroit	12	1	0	.923	417	234
Minnesota	10	2	0	.833	297	219
Green Bay	9	4	0	.692	349	274
Chicago	4	8	0	.333	241	240
West						
Seattle	7	5	0	.583	272	265
Arizona	6	6	0	.500	266	259
L.A. Rams	6	6	0	.500	254	290
San Francisco	5	7	0	.417	270	295

e-eliminated from playoffs | x-clinched playoff spot
y-clinched division

Mobley scores career-high 41 points as Cavaliers beat Hornets

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Sports

Juan Soto could decide on his next team this weekend

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2024 HOM: Doc is in, while Kim repeats

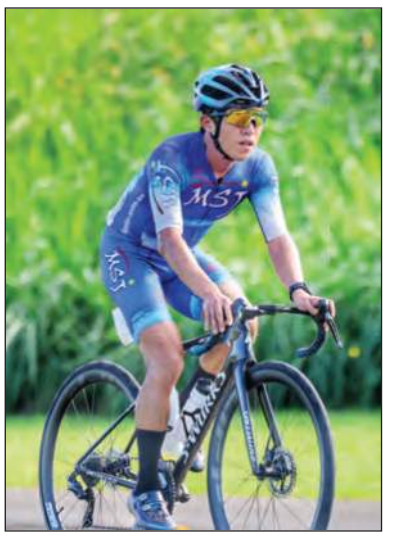
By LEIGH GASES
leigh_gases@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

Despite the unpredictable weather, one thing is always certain in the annual Hell of the Marianas Century Cycle: Participants will endure "hell" in Saipan's grueling yet scenic terrain.

The 100-kilometer pro/elite division is always definitely not for the faint of heart as riders navigate the whirlwind

LEIGH GASES

Third place in the grueling 100-km pro/elite division, the Netherlands' Rick Nobel speaks with interviewers after his race in the 2024 Hell of the Marianas Century Cycle at the former Mariana Resort & Spa in Marpi last Saturday.



LEIGH GASES

First place in the grueling 100-kilometer pro/elite division Ryo Inoue of Japan rides the last few meters of the course to the finish line of the 2024 Hell of the Marianas Century Cycle at the former Mariana Resort & Spa in Marpi last Saturday.

of lows and highs of Saipan's hills, valleys, scenic byways, including 4,900 feet of ascents—starting from the former Mariana Resort & Spa in Marpi going south along Middle Road—and back to Marpi where the infamous Suicide Cliff literally took their beath away due to its rolling hills and steep inclines.

Even with that, that didn't stop over 150 bikers from partaking in the annual race that returned last year

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LEIGH GASES

Top 3 overall in the 100-km pro/elite division including first place Ryo Inoue, center, with second place Michiya Suzuki, third right, and third place Rick Noble, third left, pose with their prizes and Ataari dinner show performers during the awards ceremony of the 2024 Hell of the Marianas Century Cycle at the Crowne Plaza Resort Saipan last Saturday.

LEIGH GASES

Top 3 in the 100-km pro/elite women's division including repeat first place winner Miso Kim, center, with second place Yukako Suzuki, third right, and third place Jiseon Jang, third from left, pose with their prizes and Ataari dinner show performers during the awards ceremony of the 2024 Hell of the Marianas Century Cycle at the Crowne Plaza Resort Saipan last Saturday.

Antoni officially signs with Tennessee

By LEIGH GASES
leigh_gases@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

CNMI son and early high school graduate Antoni Kade Ogumoro is continuing his academic and athletic pursuits with the University of Tennessee in Knoxville after he officially put pen to paper and signed with them last Thursday.

The signing ceremony at Elgin High School in Oklahoma was attended by his parents, Ambrose and Mayumi; his godfather, Carlos Aguon; Elgin students and staff; the football coaching staff; his friends; and local media.

Earlier this year, the 6'5", 320-lb offensive lineman committed to the University of Tennessee on a full-ride scholarship, joining the Tennessee Volunteers football program (also known as the Vols, UT, or Big Orange). He became the 10th commitment for UT's 2025 class.

He is an early enrollee and starts college on Jan. 20, 2025. He graduates high school this Dec. 13, but will walk with his senior class in May 2025.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

The CNMI's Antoni Ogumoro smiles for the camera as he officially signs to the University of Tennessee last week at Elgin High School in Oklahoma.

He concluded his high school career on the Dean's Honor Roll. In athletics, he earned 3A First Team All-Area and 3A First Team All-Conference honors in 2023. In 2024, he was named among The Oklahoman's Top 30 Players in

See ANTONI on Page 15

Undefeated KobES crushes GES for co-ed hoops title

By LEIGH GASES
leigh_gases@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

Undefeated KobES crushes GES for co-ed hoops title

The Koblerville Elementary School Umangs 1's sharp-shooting pincers crushed Garapan Elementary School Mallards 2, 43-11, in the finals of the 2024-2025 IT&E Interscholastic Co-ed Elementary School Basketball League last Saturday at the Marianas High School Gymnasium.

The Umangs redeemed themselves as they clawed their way back to first place after failing to reach the finals last season. They had their three-time championship streak snapped and came back hungry to restart their title run again this year—and their hard work paid off.

Despite not having a basketball court to practice on at their campus until about a week before this season started, the Umangs fought their way to the top spot with an undefeated record of five wins and took that momentum to the playoffs and championships.

They faced off against the Mallards—who had just brought down last season's champions Kagman Elementary School Blue Marlins before the finals—so by the time they faced off, the wear and tear showed.

The Umangs—who sat pretty the whole morning as they waited for the championship round—came out guns blazing in the first quarter. They attacked the basket with unrelenting force and by the time the smoke cleared, they were up 11-0 at the end of the first quarter.

The Mallards finally got on the board in the second quarter from a field goal by Hayden Kileleman, plus a long 3-pointer from Vince Imperial. But the Umangs added 8 more from back-to-back assaults at the net for a 19-7 game.

It was all Umangs in the second half as almost everyone on their roster contributed to their tally. They opened up the final quarters of the game with a 3 by Baylyn Mansfield, while the Mallards could only swish in 4 points the whole third and fourth quarter.

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LEIGH GASES

Champions Koblerville Elementary School Umangs 1 pose for a photo with runner-up Garapan Elementary School 2 during the awards ceremony of the 2024-2025 IT&E Interscholastic Co-ed Elementary School Basketball League last Saturday at the Marianas High School Gymnasium.